

BRIGHTEST AND BEST OF ALL SCHOOLGIRL  
STORY-PAPERS!

# The SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN 2¢



**THE STRANGE CONDUCT  
OF SHERAMI!**

(An exciting moment in the long  
complete story of the Morocco  
schoolgirls inside.)

A splendid complete story of the Morcove schoolgirls.

# A SCHOOLGIRL'S TREASURE!



By  
**MARJORIE  
STANTON.**

*Accustomed to beautiful and valuable things all her life, Pam Willoughby does not set any particular value on the old Burmese casket which she has brought from her home to serve as a workbasket at school. But, little though she suspects it, that same casket is responsible for a whole lot of strange happenings at Morcove!*

## Bunshine and Storm!

**L**ANCES of early evening sunlight pierced the Spring-time foliage of this woodland glade, where some eight jolly schoolgirls were resting awhile.

They were not tired, or only pleasantly so. It had been impossible to know a moment's real fatigue during this exciting day which the chums of Study 12 at Morcove School had been spending at Swanlake.

Desultory talk had ceased in the last minute, and the song of birds broke the silence. Swanlake, the home of Pam Willoughby's people, was in the depth of the country—a vast estate, and Pam's chums had been revelling in its glories all day.

At last Polly Linton came out of a pleasant muse and smiled to see the others under such a spell.

"Well, are we going to stay here all night?"

"It would be fun," was Betty Barton's prompt remark.

"Bekas," joined in impish Naomer Nakara, "we could believe we were in ze wilds of South Ameriky, thousands of miles, millions of miles, from everybodies!"

"Not millions, Naomer?" demurred Helen Craig mildly.

"Thousands of millions!"

"Then what about getting back to Morcove?" argued Pam, who was always able to sustain a burst of flippancy. "We only had leave for one day and a night!"

"Good job if we never get back to Morcove," Naomer rashly declared. "Nuzzing but work!"

Polly put a hand to an ear.

"Pardon? Did you say—work?"

"As wegawds wovk," Paula Crecel exclaimed languidly, whilst she produced a pocket-comb and mirror. "I am inclined to agwee—"

"You are inclined to look at yourself just a bit

too often, Paula," Polly chided the beloved duffer of the Fourth Form. "Take my word for that. If we are lost in the jungle, what does it matter how one looks!"

"But Paula means to walk the millions of miles," was Madge Minden's playful allusion to the elegant one's notorious languor.

"Lost!" Polly said tragically. "The native portiers have deserted us—"

"That was because you didn't tip them," pointed out Betty.

"Absurd," objected Polly. "I'm not speaking of railway porters. Here we are, alone and stranded, slow music. Paula has lost all her frocks. We have nothing to eat—"

"That's done it," said Tess Trolawney. "Talking of eating has made me feel peckish."

She, the artistic member of the party, closed a small sketch-book, on a page of which she had been pencilling the bole of a tree.

"So what about it?" she asked cheerfully.

"We will push on, and, who knows," Polly said dramatically; "we may yet see civilisation again. Paula—Paula must be left behind; she could never stand the march!"

"On the contrary, galls, if you are weary to return for dinnah—"

"We will cover her with leaves," Polly resumed, suiting the action to the word, "and—"

"Ow, dwop, it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You are so frivolous," complained lost-teased Paula, shaking off the shower of last autumn's dry leaves. "If you would help me up, one of you—for I am a bit cramped—ow!"

"Ooo, queek, do it again, do it again!" pleaded Naomer as Paula tumbled backwards into a mossy hollow. "Bravo!"

Paula, doubtless, would have had a very indignant look for the dusky one, but at this moment Polly became more dramatic than ever. She gave such a thrilling cry that Paula fairly jumped.

"Hark! I hear footsteps! Look—a white man, at last!"

Pam Willoughby's father was not a bit taken aback by this sensational outcry which his strolling upon the scene had inspired. He knew his own daughter and her schoolgirl chums too well!

"Saved!" said Pam, walking across to her

father. "But bother you, dad, just when we were thinking of spending the night here!"

"Do as you please," he jested back. "If you don't mind a soaking."

"Soaking!" echoed several of the girls incredulously.

"You can't see from here, but there's a glitter in the sunlight—thunder about."

Even as Mr. Willoughby said it, a long, low roll of distant thunder rumbled in the air.

"Well!" said Pam. "I could never have believed it possible! Hands up those who still want to stay out all night!"

"Hands up those who are for getting back to dinner!" was Mr. Willoughby's counter cry, and every hand went up, including his own. "The 'ays' have it."

Pam slipped her arm in his and playfully tapped the cigar he was smoking.

"How many is that, to-day, dad?"

"Fifth—sixth? I don't know!"

"Too many!"

"Habit," he pleaded, starting to stroll back with all the girls. "Got seasoned to cigars when I was in India."

Pam informed her chums:

"One of these days, when I want a bit of extra pocket-money, I shall have a grand clear-out of dad's empty cigar boxes. There must be hundreds at home—all the same make! You never smoke any other cigars, do you, dad, but these that come from India?"

"I still get them sent to me from the same old place," he agreed, giving an appreciative glance to his good cigar. "Hate changes."

Betty exclaimed:

"But you didn't hate leaving India to come home to Swanlake, Mr. Willoughby? That must have been some change!"

"It was! And you girls—if you, at this moment, were where I was, in India, you wouldn't talk so lightly about spending a night under the trees."

"Bekas," Naomer visualised, "zo tiger!"

"Tigers are all right," smiled Pam's father.

"No objection to tigers."

"Bai Jove," breathed Paula amazedly.

"What about the time, dad, when you were lost in that teak forest in Burma!" Pam reminded him softly. "You must tell that story to my chums some time! Tigers or no tigers, give me Swanlake, anyhow, instead of Burma!"

She did not say it in a glorying manner, although they were all moving clear of the trees now, and the stately grandeur of the Swanlake domain was before their eyes. Pam was thinking of the Burma that her father had known; the dark and fearsome parts which civilisation had yet to grapple with.

"Heard the nightingale?" he changed the subject.

"Yes, dad!"

And so the chatter flowed into homely channels once more. In a happy-hearted, leisurely fashion, the girls sauntered with Mr. Willoughby towards the great mansion which crowned a knoll in the vast park.

The sun was still shining, but the chums could see in which quarter there was the threat of a storm. Working up very slowly in the western sky was a mass of purplish cloud, and from that direction the muttering of thunder came again.

A fine old grandfather clock was striking half-past six when the Morecovians entered by the big front door. So, up to their respective rooms

they scampered, knowing that the gong would shortly sound. Betty, sharing a room with Polly, went to the window.

"Yes, Swanlake is the place!"

"I could do with a month," said Polly, shaking out the frock she was to wear this evening. Then, knowing that ten minutes would be ample for her dressing, she tossed the frock aside in happy-go-lucky manner and joined Betty at the window.

"The miles you can see, Betty!"

"And not a soul! I wouldn't like it always, Polly. But it is a change from Morecove, imagine the games field at this moment!"

"Swarming," nodded Polly. "And the seashore as bad! Just the evening for girls to go down the zig-zag to the shore, and back to school by the other path—"

"The one that brings you out by Cliff-edge Bungalow?" Betty murmured. "By the way—Cliff-edge Bungalow, Polly! I wonder if Pam has told her father that some people from India have come to stay there?"

"There goes the sun," Polly commented, as the molten orb suddenly dipped into the hard edge of the thunder-cloud. "My word, quite dark all at once!"

The room, as both girls turned away from the window, was certainly plunged into sudden gloom. Nor was there to be any return to a pleasant evening light, either indoors or without. When presently the chums mustered for dinner, in the spacious lounge-hall, there was an untimely darkness which called for the electric lights.

"Coming up fast," was Mr. Willoughby's murmur, after a nearer-sounding roll of thunder. "But let's go in."

"Yes, girls, come along!" gaily appealed Pam's handsome mother, looking very charming in a lovely evening frock and with a rope of pearls looped around her neck.

She led the way, but only a few steps had all of them taken when there was a scared pausing. Lightning had flashed into the house, and there was the hurting crash of thunder directly overhead. Paula squealed:

"Howwows!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

By the time they had taken their seats at table, the rain was drumming down. Gradually the noise of the deluge in between the deafening claps of thunder, and the fitful flare of lightning, got beyond a joke. So Mr. Willoughby quitted his seat to go to the windows and draw the curtains across.

"Hallo!" they heard his astonished utterance, a few seconds later; and they all saw him peering out into the premature darkness. "But I must be dreaming! Pam, come and tell me what you see, will you?"

She was out of her chair instantly, flashing to his side.

"Where, dad? Oh, yes—I see! I see three strangely-dressed persons coming through the rain—running for shelter."

The lightning blazed again, and Pam must have seen them very vividly then. For she added excitedly:

"Why, I know them—at least, I know who they are! Dad, they are the Indian people staying at Cliff-edge Bungalow!"

#### Only a Curio!

PAM'S father looked at her, his eyes showing greater bewilderment than ever. "Indians? And staying, where did you say?"



"At a bungalow on the edge of the cliffs, dad, near Morcove School. A lady and two girls—at least—"

Pam's voice was drowned by the fresh peal of thunder which came with truly terrifying violence, seeming to shake the house. After that appalling rattle and crash, all in the room heard the rain falling heavier still.

Every member of the dinner-party was now up from table. Betty and the other girls were looking a bit agitated. The moment seemed to be charged with something as potential as the very electricity which was in the air.

Suddenly the dining-room door opened and a parlourmaid addressed the master of the house.

"Can you come, sir, please? There are people here—I can't quite make them out! They are—foreign. Their talk is hard to understand—"

"All right, Amy!"

That rather scared-looking domestic was evidently comforted by the master's calm tone. For Mr. Willoughby, however astounded he may have been a moment since, was now quite at ease again. He exchanged a look with his wife and went out.

"But I think I also ought to go and see," broke from Pam's mother, and she set off for the door. "They must be drenched, whoever they are, and we must do our best for them."

Then the chums of Morcove found themselves alone together, staring at one another in a bewildered, nonplussed way. At a loss for words, they had the constant peals of thunder breaking in upon the silent room.

"Geals, I—I don't like it," quavered Paula, suddenly sinking down into her chair. "It's—uncanny."

"Strange, anyhow!" agreed Betty, with a queer smile. "Just fancy—those people from the bungalow!"

"You are sure, Pam?" whispered Polly.

"Quite sure! It was like seeing them by broad daylight whilst that long flash lasted. You know how they dress—in their own native way. There was the mother—you know how tall!—and the two girls, one so much older than the other."

"Then what on earth are they doing over this way?" wondered Helen Craig. "Miles from Morcove!"

"I say—an idea!" exclaimed Polly. "Have they heard that Mr. Willoughby was once in India? Were they coming to see him, and got caught by the storm?"

"I'd have expected them to come by car, in that case," Betty remarked. "Tisn't as if they were poor."

Madge echoed that last word in a laughing way.

"Poor! They can't be that, judging by what we have seen of them, since they took the furnished bungalow."

"Wather not, bai Jove!" said Paula. "On the contaway—Ow, dash!" And, aware of what must follow the further flash of lightning, timorous Paula clapped both hands to her ears.

Again there was silence in the dining-room, making the bang-crash of thunder sound all the more appalling. Then the door opened and Pam's mother came in, all reassuring smiles.

"Your father, Pam, can talk with them better than I can. They know so little English, and he has their language so pat!"

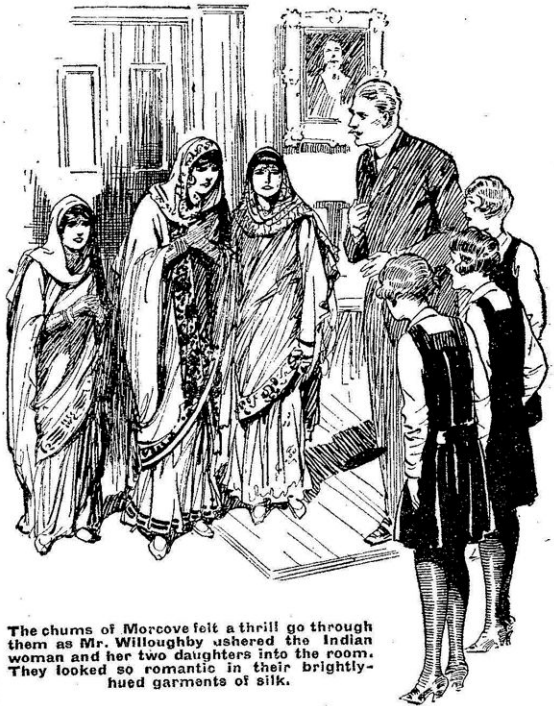
"But, mother—"

"They were more frightened than wet, it's a blessing to know. I don't see how we could have provided a change of things that they would have cared to wear!" Mrs. Willoughby said blithely. "You girls mustn't mind if we have to sleep them here to-night."

"Ooo, good job!" Naomer hailed this hint. "Bekas, then we shall get to know them, after seeing zem so often at Morcove and zinking it so strange!"

"Something in that," agreed Polly brightly. "They have been rather a mystery, Mrs. Willoughby. You see, we so often—"

And there the madcap broke off. She and her chums felt a thrill go through them as the mystery tenants of the bungalow were ushered into this great dining-room by Mr. Willoughby.



The chums of Morcove felt a thrill go through them as Mr. Willoughby ushered the Indian woman and her two daughters into the room. They looked so romantic in their brightly-hued garments of silk.

In spite of the easy-going heartiness with which Pam's father brought them forward, all three strangers were very bashful. The tall woman came to a standstill, looking at one and another of the English girls in a smiling way; but it was a nervous smile, and the darkness of her skin and the beady-brightness of her eyes made her a rather forbidding personage.

Beside the mother stood the well-grown girl who was believed to be one of her daughters. This girl was also a prey to great nervousness. But the much younger girl—no older than any of the Morcovians—although she kept in the background, was not so nervous as shy. So, at least, Betty & Co. fancied.

All three had evidently discarded outer raiment which had got wet. It left them looking all the more Oriental in their rich, vividly-coloured silken clothes, the two girls wearing much more jewellery than ever a British girl would put on. Every brown arm had its golden-bangles.

Mr. Willoughby closed the door behind him.

"Our friends will take the best that we have to offer them," he remarked lightly. "It appears that they have been enjoying a day's outing and were caught by the storm. They were going to pick up the bus that goes from Grangemoor to Morcove, but were driven to seek shelter."

After following all this with obvious difficulty, the woman turned to Mrs. Willoughby and the girls as if to see how they had taken it. She bowed, implying that she felt herself to be introduced to the company in general.

"You are welcome," was Mrs. Willoughby's smiling assurance. "I am sorry I cannot speak your language."

"We spik English a leetle," said the native lady, with a flash of her perfect teeth. "We tank you!"

Pam and some of the other girls now set extra chairs at the table, which was fully big enough to receive the additions to the party. Then Naomer showed that she would like the younger of the two daughters to sit next to her. But all was great embarrassment until a few words from Mr. Willoughby, in the native language, made the greatest difference.

With a sudden excitable laugh, the lady burst into broken English.

"Tank you; I see you like to be friends, you young ladies who go to the school near the sea? It is good! I shall let my children be the friends with you, tank you! Sherami," she named her elder daughter, whilst gesturing to her to take a seat between Pam and Madge. And then to the younger girl:

"Lotilla!"

So the chums knew that that was the name of this pretty youngster who was going to sit between Naomer and Polly.

"The lady's name is Shandry Khan—Madame Khan, I understand, whilst on her travels," explained Mr. Willoughby. "And now we will see what we can do."

He went away, but it was only another minute before he returned in front of a servant who was bringing in a special dish for the storm-bound three. The Swanlake larder always kept a small store of Mr. Willoughby's favourite Indian dishes, and it was an obvious delight to the mother and her daughters to find what a familiar course was being served.

The others could have resumed their evening dinner, but they were more inclined to pay attention to all that Madame Khan had to say, in

broken English, now that she had been set at ease.

Betty & Co. began to understand that the stay at the bungalow was purely for pleasure. The lady and her two daughters had been travelling about a good deal in the last six months. They had "done" the Continent, and they had now come to Great Britain for the spring and summer. In May, they would go to London.

Very subdued were both girls until the adjournment to the drawing-room. Then, however, Naomer got "well away" with little Lotilla. Naomer's own English being rather quaint, to hear the pair of them chattering faster and faster made the other girls want to laugh outright.

Sherami had not, it seemed, the younger one's happy disposition. None of the Study 12 girls could make much headway with Sherami. She was like one who is "remembering to behave," often looking towards her mother as if for an approving smile.

Presently the thunderstorm was a mere rumbling in the distance, and then some music could be had. Madge was persuaded to play, and Pam—another of Morcove's brilliant musicians—supplied a piece or two. But the amount of excitable talk going on proved that music was not really needed to help out the evening.

In a corner to themselves, Naomer and Lotilla were going through an album of photographs together, and at every turn of a leaf Lotilla was dabbing a brown finger at the picture, as if it were familiar to her.

"Ze photographs of Burma—Lotilla say they are where she come from!" Naomer informed the company in general.

Madame Khan smiled, but a few moments later she called Lotilla across to her and spoke some words of advice in the native that appeared rather to suppress the girl's rising spirits.

"So you come from Burma?" Pam exclaimed lightly. "Where my father was for years! Before you go in the morning, Madame Khan, perhaps you would like to see my father's collection?"

"Tank you very much, I should like it," said the Indian lady, and she stood up. Apparently, she had misunderstood Pam and expected to be shown the collection now!

"Come on then, all," Pam tactfully proposed.

"Ooo, yes, queek, queek! Lotilla, you keep with me, and we see everything. It is wonderful, you see!"

"A lot of old junk, that's what our friends will think it," chuckled Mr. Willoughby, as he prepared to accompany the party. He had talked sufficiently with Madame Khan to be aware that she had a palace full of real treasures in her own native country. She was a lady of high "caste," apparently.

Be that as it might, she was no less eager than her two daughters to make for the great gallery room, on the second floor, which housed the Swanlake collection of Burmese antiques and trophies.

With the lights clicked on, into the vast museum filed the entire party. Pam's chums, often though they had been here, would have been as impressed as ever; but it fascinated them to see with what excited interest the mother and her daughters began a round of the exhibits.

Lotilla was all for admiring the things that Naomer most admired—the trophies of the chase! Tiger heads, snarling out of preserved grasses, ivory tusks, and so on—Naomer and Lotilla hung about these admiringly.

As for Madame Khan and her elder daughter, they studied the antiques which had once adorned native palaces, and the weird things which had come from strange temples.

"Fancy your father calling it junk, Pam!" exclaimed Polly, at last.

The little lady of Swanlake laughed.

"But he is like that, really," she assured the chums who were near enough to receive a quiet remark. "Dad would give the lot for a good old master! I like the old china, myself, and wish I could have a few of these big vases for the study at Morcove."

"They wouldn't leave much room, some of them, for doing prep!" was Polly's comment on their size.

"Perhaps not," agreed Pam. "Here's a thing, though, that I think I shall bag whilst I'm here—this work-basket thing!"

And with delicious carelessness about the right to help herself, she took a small casket of carved wood, inlaid with gold and mother-o'-pearl, from its stand.

"What's this thing, dad?"

"Oh, that!" Mr. Willoughby had Madame Khan and her elder daughter with him, as he came up. "Another bit of junk, my dear. Let



"Can I have this, father?" Pam asked. "It will come in handy for needlework." Mr. Willoughby assented indulgently, but neither he nor Pam noticed how keenly the Indians looked at the casket.

Pam gave a sleepy smile as she was reminded of her freakish fancy for the box. Then she turned a different way, yawned, and sank to sleep again, with the low muttering of thunder still coming out of a lightning-lit sky.

#### Morcove Once More!

"YOU beauties!" the chums were playfully upbraided by Etta Hargrove, as they came storming into Morcove's great school-house at half-past three next day. "You would take care not to get back before this!"

"Of course!" Polly assented blithely. "You didn't suppose we were going to get back in time for morning school?"

"Thought you might be in time for afternoon school, anyhow!" laughed Etta.

"No, said Polly. "Oh, dear, no! But now that we are back—"

"Ooo, yes, queek, queek! Tea!"

"Before we return to the fway, yes, wather!" sighed Paula, with thoughts of evening "prep." Moreover, Paula had had a most trying journey back to school.

When a six-seater car, however "posh," is made to accommodate eight schoolgirls, there must be some squashing. Paula had been very badly squashed. She had not survived the journey like

me see—I fancy I brought that from some old temple."

"Anyhow, I can have it?" Pam suggested serenely. "Come in useful at the school. Handy for needlework!"

"You can have it," was the easy-going response. "It's no use to me!"

Madame Khan bent towards the curio which Pam held, eyeing it closely. She smiled at the schoolgirl.

"Very good, you tink?"

"Very good for my purpose!" Pam blandly responded. "Thanks, dad; this goes with me to Morcove in the morning!"

They all moved on, resuming the round of the gallery, and, for all the others were aware, Madame Khan and her elder daughter were just as interested in everything as ever. None noticed that the curious box which Pam had with her was coming in for glances now and then from those two Indians. So darting were those glances—as quick as they were covetous!

At bed-time, Pam carried the Oriental casket up to her room, dumping it down as something

Pam, for example. Pam came into the school-house with her light step, dainty as ever, with a smile for everyone.

All the way upstairs the chums had an escort of gossipy schoolmates. From studies in the Fourth Form quarters appeared other juniors, as if the voices of Betty & Co. had exercised a sort of charm.

Like Etta, a good many girls pretended annoyance with the Study 12 coterie for having "bagged" an extra day at Swanlake. This alleged grievance against the Form captain and her chums, however, did not prevent a very friendly crowding out of Study 12.

"This is all very well," Polly expostulated, trying to lay tea amidst the crush, "but it doesn't give us a chance. We want to get tea over, and then—then work! Don't make it hard for us, girls!"

"Out of ze way, everybodyes, plis!" yelled Naomer, zoming away from the corner with a dish of pastries. "Ooo, queek! I want tea and a cream-bun! Paula—"

Paula drew in her feet too late, as she already reclined in the armchair. Naomer spilt the pastries, and then Betty, turning round to see why there were such sudden shouts of laughter, got the tea-caddy knocked out of her grasp.

There was a minor crash as the wooden caddy fell to the floor, spilling all the tea.

"There, now!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dweadful!" groaned Paula, shaking pastry crumbs and sticky currants out of her lap. "Geals—"

"This has done for our own pet caddy," deplored Betty, picking up the article minus its lid. "Biscuit tin, after this."

"Or Pam will hand over the famous casket, for use as a caddy," Polly suggested brightly. "The very thing!"

Those who had not been to Swanlake evinced curiosity.

"Famous casket?" they echoed.

"Pam dear, take them round to your study and show it to them," Polly pleaded breezily. "Then we can get on."

So a very welcome exodus took place, and now it was another study which became crowded out. Pam, undoing a very carelessly tied-up parcel, did not appear to be going to reveal anything at all fascinating. But the moment the Oriental casket came to light there were cries of admiration.

"Oh, Pam!"

"How lovely!"

"From home, Pam? But what is it—what's it meant for?"

"Goodness knows!" shrugged Pam, crumpling up brown paper to shy it away in a ball. "Some Burmese thing that I fancied would be useful. Workbasket sort of gadget, you know."

"But you never do any needlework!" laughed Etta.

"That's why," said Pam serenely. "I want a thing like this where I can put all my needlework tackle out of sight. It can stand there," she added, dumping it on the mantelshelf.

The crowd still admired it.

"Must be awfully valuable, Pam!"

"Oh, I don't know! Dad didn't seem to think so."

"But look at all the inlay—the design in brass. Or is it gold?" wondered Katey Murray.

"Oh, gold, I expect," Pam responded, throw-

ing stale flowers out of the window. "It wouldn't be brass—hardly."

She suddenly eyed it with displeasure.

"No, I don't think I quite like it where it is," she decided. "It clashes with my blue-and-white china. Better put it—oh, there will do!"

"Pam!" was the shocked chorus, as her schoolmates saw her transfer the casket to a bookshelf.

"How can you, Pam—such a lovely thing!"

But Pam only laughed as she hurried away, leaving any who wished to do so free to go on admiring the curio. Pam wanted her tea along with Betty and the rest!

"Did you ever know such a girl?" murmured Etta, lingering with others. "It's the same when you go to her home; she seems to think nothing of the most wonderful things!"

"But is that casket so very wonderful?" asked a voice that had not been heard during the previous talk.

Nor was it a very pleasant voice, being Ursula Wade's. Some of the other juniors looked at her aloofly, without answering, and indeed Ursula was a girl who seemed to ask for disdain.

She came farther into the room with her slinky step, to stand regarding the casket cynically.

"Inlaid with real gold, did Pam say? I don't think!" was Ursula's doubting comment. "A thing like that can be picked up at any dealer's shop for a few shillings."

"Can it?" said Etta, on the point of going out. "That's all you know about it, Ursula."

"You are a donk, Ursula," another girl did not hesitate to say candidly, "to show your ignorance."

Ursula sniggered.

"Some people are donks to believe all they are told! Just because Pam said it was really gold—"

"And even if the inlay is only brass—does it matter?" stamped Katey Murray. "Even if it were only plain wood, it might still be worth a lot. But of course you wouldn't understand that sort of thing!"

"But if it were Ursula's—wouldn't she be cracking it up!" laughed yet another girl, in scorn for the Fourth Form's generally disliked member. "She'd be trying to get one of us to buy it, most likely!"

Then the room emptied. If Ursula were staying, others preferred to go. But did Ursula care? Not she! Always unpleasant, whenever possible, to other girls, she was quite used to their having no friendship for her.

Looking over one shoulder at the girls who were passing out, she snarled to herself:

"Swanks! All for Pam, just because her people are so well-off!"

Her sea-green eyes went round the study which, being partly Pam's, was so tastefully equipped. Then she took a closer look at the antique, finally lifting it from the bookshelf and raising the lid for a peep inside.

The interior must have disappointed her, for she gave a little sniff of contempt. But a further inspection of the exterior seemed to leave her really impressed. When at last she stood the casket back upon the shelf, Ursula Wade fetched a sigh, as if she wished that it were hers. She drew off to the door, then looked back at the curio.

"I suppose it would sell," she was thinking, "for a good deal. But what does Pam need to trouble about its value? Who ever knew Pam

Willoughby short of money? Oh, it's sickening," she muttered sourly, "what some girls have!" Meantime, what the Study 12 girls were having was—tea!

It was good to be back again! That was the general feeling. Paula declared herself to be "a giant wofwashed, yes, wather!" As for impish Naomer, she was going to be a marvel for work. She said so. Only let her finish tea, and she would sit down to "prep."

"But first of all, I zink I go for ze bit of a run," she decided, as soon as tea was over. "Bekas if I work too soon I shall have ze india-gestion."

And she was gone!  
"I believe," chuckled Betty, "she is off after that Lotilla girl at the bungalow. Madame Khan and her daughter must have got back hours ago, and Naomer, we know, was great chums with Lotilla when they parted."

"I liked Lotilla," said Madge. "Something very bright and chummy about her, once she had got over the shyness."

"Yes, wather! A little wipper, what?"

The business of clearing away tea went on, with a good deal of talk about last evening's unique incidents—the storm, the arrival of Madame Khan and her daughters in such a plight, and the amusement they had caused.

"We mustn't forget that we promised to have the two girls over one halfer," Betty remarked presently. "The idea seemed to please them all, didn't it?"

"Madame Khan, you could see," said Helen Craig, "would be glad for her daughters to have companions. They—"

"Hark!"  
"Bai Jove, it's Naomer coming back already, geals!"

"And bringing—I do believe—yes!" Polly was able to say for certain, as she looked up the passage. "Lotilla!"

The chums gave themselves up to laughter. Not much chance for "prep." at present, when here was Naomer bringing Lotilla to Study 12!

"Bekas," they could hear Naomer chattering away breathlessly, "you want to see where we work so hard, Lotilla, and then see all over ze school! Queek, in here—this is it! This is Study 12!"

#### Strange Talk!

**I**N her own light-hearted way, Naomer was now ushering an equally breathless Lotilla into the study.

Betty and the rest gave the Burmese girl a very cordial welcome; but she was shy again, in a pretty manner, and it fell to Naomer to explain.

"Bekas, you see," panted Naomer, "I was going to look for her, and Lotilla was coming to look for me! And so we met just near the gate, and I say: 'Ooo, gorjus. Come and see the school!'"

"Sit down, Lotilla," the Form captain said, offering a chair. "Had tea? Anyhow, you would like a—"

"Ooo, yes, queek, queek; refreshments. I zink there is still one cream-bun—but, no," Naomer added in the same breath, on her way to the cupboard. "Bekas, I remember, I finished him!"

However, a nice slice of cake was forthcoming, and Lotilla enjoyed it immensely, whilst answering questions as to whether she and her mother and sister had got home quite comfortably, and so on.

"Come round the school, Lotilla!" was the hearty proposal a few minutes later, and promptly

the entire coterie became the Burmese girl's escort. She was shown the dormitories and the class-rooms, and Big Hall, with its Honours Boards, and then the chums took her into the open air.

Plenty of girls were at games, and Lotilla was as interested as she was puzzled by what various sets of players were doing. Betty & Co. did their best to explain the rules, but they could tell that she had only the foggiest notions, after all.

Then came an encounter with Miss Massingham, the Fourth Form mistress, to whom Lotilla in turn was "explained."

"I see!" the not-too-indulgent mistress commented, and gave Lotilla a sufficiently pleasant smile. "But, girls, you won't let this interfere with prep., will you? After having two whole days off!"

Betty & Co. were ready to take the hint. It was against their sense of fair play to be given an inch and to take an ell.

"But I suppose, Miss Massingham," Betty ventured, "one of us—Naomer, say—may see Lotilla back to her home?"

"Oh, yes, I suppose so!"

With the mistress walking away, the chums exchanged glances.

"Sniffy," smiled Pam. "How different from Miss Redgrave, when we had her for a mistress!"

It proved a theme for Naomer's excitable tongue, as she and Lotilla went off together. Very definitely Naomer gave Lotilla to understand that Miss Redgrave had been the one!

"All ze same, you come over as often as you like, and blow Mees Massingham," the dusky one rattled on. "Bekas, eef there is any bother, I see Mees Somerfield about it, and she is ze goods! You know what I mean by ze goods, Lotilla?"

"I think you mean the lady is—"

"Ze tip-topper, yes! You must excuse me when I spik ze slang. You see, I have been in zis country such ages! And it is good for you to know how to spik like everybody else, Lotilla. Bekas zen they understand you. So I shall teach you!"

"Thank you!"

"Do not say 'Thank you,' Lotilla. Say 'Zank you!' like everybody else does—do."

"Zee—ank you," tried Lotilla, and then they peated with laughter.

"There he is, your bungyow," the imp blithely remarked, ten minutes later. "And, eef you like, I shall come to tea one afternoon when you are not coming to tea with me, yes? Bekas, if you do not see me often, it will be a washout!"

"Wassout?"

"What they call it when you don't know what the diggings to do. Ooo, queek, zere is your mother at the gate!"

So they both broke into a run, Naomer fully intending to ingratiate herself with Madame Khan. Being asked in for "refreshments" would not come amiss; but Naomer was to find that there was "nuzzings doing!" Madame Khan, although very pleasant, seemed anxious to have Lotilla to herself.

With the sun dipping towards the sea's western horizon, back to Morcove School scampered Naomer, seeing the refulgent light upon the mighty walls and afood across the countryside. That same sunset light was shining in at seaward windows of the bungalow, although the crimson glow lasted no longer than the few minutes during which mother and younger daughter were talking together.



Then, as the sitting-room door opened to admit the elder daughter, Lotilla received a dismissing word in the native from her mother.

She passed out in a rather downcast, puzzled way, as if wondering why her mother seemed displeased.

For a few moments, in a room that was now growing shadowy, Madame Khan and her elder daughter had nothing to say to each other. At last, in their native language, the woman muttered:

"I am troubled, Sherami! Our Lotilla was at the school, and yet she did not see—ye know what!"

Sherami shrugged her narrow shoulders scornfully.

"She is but a child, our Lotilla," was the English equivalent for her comment. "What does she know, my mother? What eyes has she?"

"Eyes enough to see—all else but that!" Madame Khan exclaimed impatiently. "The games these stupid English girls play; the ugly buildings—bah! Even so, Sherami, it is there!"

"Yea, mother. Our eyes do not fail us," Sherami smiled, evidently feeling a superior contempt for her much younger sister. "Did we not see it in the hands of the Sahib Willoughby's daughter when she was saying her farewell?"

"And before—since ye talk of thine eyes and mine," was Madame Khan's tense rejoinder. "Last night, in the very moment, Sherami, that they did take us into the great room; it drew my eyes!"

"And mine!"  
There was a sudden, impressive silence. Darker still grew the bungalow's sitting-room, whilst mother and daughter stood deep in thought.

"The Casket of Kangpur!" the woman murmured slowly to herself at last. "For an English girl to possess it—"

"And for such a purpose, mother!"  
"Yea! Truly, it is an insult nothing can wipe out. If those to whom I made the vow—if they knew, Sherami! But thou and I—we must take care that Kangpur never knows!"

Sherami nodded her understanding of what must have been a very solemn warning.

Outside the bungalow there arose, suddenly and softly, the voice of a girl singing in the twilight. It was Lotilla. Youthful buoyancy had soon enabled her to recover her spirits.

"Lotilla is happy again, mother!"

"And it is well. I did wrong to show my anger; yet was I vexed, Sherami. She should have seen the casket; then could I have slept well to-night, knowing where, in that great school, it can be found!"

Sighing, the mother suddenly drew herself up, then stamped petulantly.

"Lights, Sherami. I like not this gloom. I am in Kangpur again, and the night coming out of the forest. Let Kundra bring the lights!"

#### Ursula Has Adventures!

**B**OTHER the bike! Now my blessed lamp's gone out!"

Ursula Wade was in a very bad temper. She hopped down from the saddle and shook the machine violently.

A mile back there had been the sudden ping! of a back tyre—and no puncture outfit in the little toolbag! Not that the requisite things would have been much use to Ursula, since it would have baffled her to mend a puncture by lamplight.

She had struggled along, the back wheel bumping heavily. Then a bad bit of road had caused

such a tremendous jolting that the lamp, after blinking several times, had blobbed out! It had not been burning well when she started away from Barncombe, after a stolen visit to the cinema.

Past nine o'clock, and a good mile and a half yet to go. Ursula was in for it now!

Useless to plead that bad luck with lamp and tyre had made her so late! By the rules of the school, she should have left Barncombe in time to be indoors before dark. Forced to walk half the way back? But, it would be argued by implacable Miss Massingham, if she, Ursula, had started back at the right time, she could have walked ALL the way, and still been only a few minutes late!

Savagely Ursula regretted having stayed to see the end of that very fascinating film. She did not see how she was going to escape heavy punishment. Tramping on, with the bicycle to trundle every yard of the way, she thought to herself moodily:

"Better if the wretched thing had thrown me!"  
From this, it was a leap of her mind to the crafty idea: How about pretending she had met with a bad spill on the road?

To get indoors at last, limping badly—a jolly fine way of getting pitied instead of rowed! Only they were so precious fussy at Morcove about the least little hurt to a girl. Matron would pass her on to nurse, who would probably advise a look-in by the doctor in the morning. Then the fraud would be known.

But now something occurred to suggest a safe variation of Ursula's idea.

A little to the left of the nightbound roadway shone the lights of Cliff-edge Bungalow. Acting on her improved scheme, Ursula promptly found a large stone and bashed at one pedal of the machine until the crank was unworkable.

Ursula had less scruple than ever about doing this, as the machine was not her own! She had simply helped herself from the dozens of bicycles racked in the school's cycle-sheds, taking Pam Willoughby's, as it happened.

"Pam can afford to get it mended," Ursula said to herself spitefully.

If there was one girl more than another whom Ursula envied, in a sour way, it was the girl who had returned from Swanlake, a couple of days ago, along with Betty and the rest.

Now that the machine had the proper wrecked appearance, Ursula lugged it only as far as the turn-in to the private path leading to the bungalow. There she slung the machine aside, and then went with a dragging step to the bungalow porch.

She rang, being quite prepared to pitch a plausible story that would "do the trick." But it rather took her aback when the door was opened by a woman-servant who was obviously of Oriental birth.

"Oh—er—you speak English?" stammered Ursula.

The servant, a short, dark-faced, swarthy woman, shook her head and looked like closing the front door upon Ursula, but suddenly a sitting-room door opened, letting someone else come forward.

Ursula found the speechless native servant giving place to the tall native lady, whose coming to Cliff-edge, with her two daughters, had so excited Morcove.

"You—you speak English?" Ursula again faltered.

"A leetle, yes, what is it?"

"I am very sorry," the crafty girl began glibly, "but I have had to leave my bicycle just inside your gateway. I have had bad luck. I—they'll wonder what has become of me at the school, but I can't help that. I feel—dead beat."

It was hard for Ursula to appear in such innocent distress when the dark eyes of Madame Khan were piercing her through and through.

"You want to sit?" that lady conjectured at last. Come in.

"Thank you, if I might—rest awhile?"

Ursula's heart was beating rather nervously as she followed the tenant of the bungalow into a room as dim-lit as the hall. The place and its people seemed to be so uninviting—so un-English.

The elder daughter was here, and she rose as the mother ushered in Ursula. Something was said by Madame Khan in the native, and then Sherami's white teeth suddenly gleamed out of her dark face—her smile for Ursula.

"You not want to go to the school to-night?" Sherami asked.

"Oh, I must get on to the school presently; but," Ursula added, feeling that she must carry out her artful ruse, "I feel too tired—too shaken up at present. If you understand?"

Mother and daughter nodded.

"Sit then!" exclaimed Madame Khan. "If you like, you stay the night with us, and I tell the school. Sherami will go to say where you are, yes?"

Ursula felt encouraged to gush.

"Oh, it's awfully kind of you! Of course, if you could get word to the school, to save anxiety? But won't it bother you to keep me all night?"

"Not so," answered Madame Khan, and, in spite of her naturally stern looks, it was evident that she was well-disposed. "All right! You shall stay."

Then the mother and daughter conversed together in their own language. For a minute the rapid, purring talk went on, after which Sherami smiled broadly at Ursula whilst crossing to the door.

"Do not fear; I shall tell them right. But what is the name?"

"My name? Oh, say it is Ursula Wade who is here. Ur—su—la Wade!"

Sherami seemed to repeat the name slowly under her breath. Then, with a nod, she went out.

Madame Khan turned to Ursula with what was meant to be an ingratiating smile.

"Morcove very big school, very good? Plenty girl at Morcove?"

"Oh, yes, I love it!" gushed Ursula.

"Plenty good friend for Sherami and Lotilla at Morcove?" Madame Khan suggested pleasantly, seating herself. "I am ver' pleased!"

"One of your daughters came to see some of



Naomer ushered Lotilla into the study. "I met her near the gate, coming to look for me," she explained happily.

the girls, the other evening?" Ursula remarked. She felt she was getting along splendidly, after all.

Madame Khan nodded delightedly.

"So! Lotilla not know you yet! Lotilla know—" There was a pause to get the names right. "Polly, yes? Bee—etty, yes? Pam—Pam!" laughed Madame Khan, as if that name amused her. "Sweet—au—lak?"

"Oh, Swanlake! Yes, Pam's home! You have been there?"

"Very good, very big 'ouse!" the Burmese lady remarked admiringly. "The sahib know my country, so we are friend! You see the—how you call it?—the casket, from my country, yes? At the school, I tink?"

Ursula was starting to rub her forehead bewilderedly with one finger, and then she got the meaning.

"Oh, the box-thing that Pam brought from her home! Yes, I have seen it!"

Madame Khan sat forward in her low chair, continuing the talk.

"Very good, you tink?"

"The box? It's—handy, of course, and they say it is very valuable." Ursula gossiped. What she dreaded was the talk coming to a standstill.

"Handy?" echoed the Burmese lady, as if puzzled by that word.

"For Pam Willoughby, you know; in her study—"

"Ah, yes, yes! In the Pam study? Eet is not where she sleep?"

Ursula burst out laughing.

"Oh, no! The studies are where we work, you understand? School work! Lessons that have to be done out of class!

"Ah, yes, yes! One girl, one study—so?"

"Not exactly," corrected Ursula. "One study for two or three, or even four girls. Pam shares with one other girl—Helen Craig, now."

Madame Khan was very interested.

"Lotilla, at the school, see only one study, I tink? She not see the one of Pam? No casket!"

"Lotilla went to Study 12, I expect," Ursula gave the explanation, for what it seemed worth. "Pam's study is the next but one. Where is Lotilla, Madame Khan? I—I'd like to see her."

But it came out that Lotilla had gone to bed, so she would not be seen by Ursula to-night. In her broken English, Madame Khan hinted that Ursula would have to share Sherami's room, and this rather shook Ursula's nerve. She had no real spirit, and a novel experience that might have thrilled any ordinary girl was, to Ursula, distasteful. She liked the commonplace.

"You like to be friend with Sherami?" was asked presently.

"Oh, yes!" said Ursula, although that was just what she was thinking she would never want to be. Another girl would have felt that here was a chance of an interesting companionship; but Ursula would have no use for any of these people after to-night.

"Come, I show you where to sleep," Madame Khan suggested, getting up. "You not tank me, but you show Sherami the school one day?"

Ursula, rising, almost forgot to look as dead-beat and badly shaken as she had made herself out to be. Even though she quickly remembered to adopt the right pose, she felt that Madame Khan made a suspicious pause, on the way from the room.

Then they came to Sherami's room—on the ground floor, of course, this being a bungalow—and Ursula felt a sudden great dislike about staying the night after all. Her craven nature shrank from the experience.

Madame Khan, showing the room by the light of a candle, became, in Ursula's eyes, a very forbidding, uncanny person. It was simply "nerves" with Ursula. The room was pleasant and English enough, and the Khans, although only in temporary occupation of the bungalow, were known to be of good standing.

"Come back to the other room and my servant will give you to eat," the dark lady said, smiling. "Then Sherami will come and it will be time for sleep."

She resumed, after they had returned to the sitting-room:

"So, you tink the casket of your friend Pam is valuable? You hear them say so, yes?"

Ursula felt her mind being brought back to the casket with all the greater sharpness, because her thoughts were of other things. Should she stay after all—or not? Better not! Better to go on to the school and plead that she had preferred not to stay. That would be true, anyhow!

"You not hear what I say?" Madame Khan rallied the schoolgirl, with a queer smile. "The casket—"

"Oh, yes—er—they say it is valuable, as I said just now," Ursula answered flusteredly. "And, please, I think—"

"You tink what? Is it that the daughter of the Sahib Willoughby is afraid of the thief? She hide it at night—or not so, perhaps? You do not know?"

"I—I really wasn't thinking about the casket, Madame Khan. I don't suppose for a moment that Pam Willoughby puts it away every night. There would be nowhere to put it, unless she asked Miss Somerfield to mind it for her! It can't be as valuable as all that?" submitted Ursula. "Er—I think, after all, I might get on to the school, Madame Khan—"

"So!"

"Thanking you all the same—for being so kind," Ursula blurted out, drawing off to the door. She was determined to go, not liking it here. Now and then it seemed to her that Madame Khan was—strange! Anyhow, Ursula was not at ease with her.

"Very good; you go; all the same to me," the lady shrugged. "But you must not tink I am not a friend."

Ursula reddened. For goodness' sake let her get away, now that this woman appeared to have divined the nervousness she inspired!

The open air seemed good to breathe; the lonely bungalow seemed a very good place to hurry away from, as Ursula came out upon the garden path. Only waiting until Kundra had closed the porch door upon her, she simply ran for the road.

Leaving the bicycle to be fetched some other time, along that mile of night-bound road ran Ursula, thankful she had thought better of staying. Something unpleasant about those Khans! Besides, it was a bother, keeping up talk with them; they spoke such a little English.

That woman, with her she-wolf kind of smile, keeping on about the blessed casket! Just because it was a thing that had come from their own country. At the same time, it showed that Pam must have got hold of a real curio, in that casket, for the Khans, anyhow, were people in a great way in Burma; they were not likely to give a second thought to mere rubbish, such as travellers so often brought home from that country.

Then, suddenly, Ursula's own covetous mind made her wonder: Did Madame Khan wish she owned that casket? Was the Indian lady thinking of getting Pam to part with it, for a mere nothing? It might be so! Madame Khan might know the real value far better than Pam or her parents!

But, in that case, what a pity for Madame Khan to get hold of the thing, when it would fetch quite a lot, perhaps, at a good-class dealer's!

"Makes me wish it were mine," Ursula's thoughts ran on, whilst she scampered along to the school. "I'd soon have every penny it could fetch!"

Under the starlit sky she came to the school gateway, and then it was advisable for her to adopt the dead-beat pose again. She grinned, thinking how praiseworthy her conduct was going to appear. Offered a night at the bungalow, she had felt she must struggle on to the school after all. By now, of course, Sherami had delivered the message, so the way was paved towards a glad welcoming back to the fold, and not a word of censure, only the kindest—

Had her eyes served her a trick, or was there really a dark and shadowy figure fitting about near the schoolhouse—going round to one side of

it in a noiseless manner, like someone who dare not enter by the front door, but must try to gain entry elsewhere!

Ursula peered hard through the darkness and made out the vague form again. A girl? Then it must be a Morcove girl—but no; how about Sherami!

The conviction seized Ursula there and then. Sherami, after delivering her message and leaving by the front door, had not set off back to the bungalow. She was hanging about in the school grounds—and why?

Even as the puzzled girl asked herself that question, she was rendered more amazed than ever. For she could see the figure that she deemed to be Sherami's going up the school's circular iron fire escape.

"Well, I'm dashed!" Ursula gasped to herself amazedly. "What on earth is the girl about? There she goes, mounting the steps as if—as if she wants to get into the school!"

But why?  
Only a mind as covetous as Ursula's would have jumped to the sudden belief: Sherami was wanting to steal the casket!

#### Stranger Still!

**W**HAT to do at this moment, Ursula knew not. If her disposition had been a more honest one, doubtless she would have lost no time in going after that suspicious figure, to ask what was meant by such strange conduct.

But what with being very easily agitated, and also her own proneness to shifty tactics, she simply stood still, quite undecided. Who knows? Perhaps already the thought was vaguely forming itself in Ursula's brain: If the casket was as valuable as all this, in the eyes of those Burmese people, then what about purloining it herself?

A dark shape in the darkness of night, Sherami—if she it was—had now reached the top of the iron stairway that was outside the schoolhouse. The slight form, in its loose and fluttering robe, was to be made out on the topmost platform, serving an emergency exit from the dormitory floor.

And now, as Ursula still strained her eyes to watch intently, she saw that the girl up there was trying the emergency door—in vain evidently, for at last she turned away.

Down the corkscrew iron staircase the dark figure came, causing Ursula to dart for shelter amidst some shrubs. From there the schoolgirl still watched, although she soon had to draw in her head and crouch down, for the figure was stealing by.

Sherami!

It was she, right enough. Crouching amongst the shrubs, Ursula had a clear sight of the

sinister figure as it flitted past. She saw the Eastern raiment of the girl and the dark-skinned face; saw the dark, flashing eyes as they glanced this way and that in great alarm.

A few moments and Sherami had flitted away, and so Ursula was free to creep from her ambush. But she spent another minute there, spellbound as she was by what had transpired.

It was impossible to believe that Sherami, after calling at the school with the message, had had an honest reason for lurking around like that! As for any dishonest motive—what else could it be but a hoped-for theft of the casket?

What was Morcove School to that Burmese girl? What were its scholars? But the fact remained, that casket of Pam's came from the same far-distant country as the mother and her daughters, and the mother had talked about the casket. She had been trying, Ursula felt sure, to "pump" her as to where exactly the casket was kept!

At last she ventured from her hiding-place and made her way to the front porch. Boldly, knowing that she stood a good chance of being excused, she pulled the bell, and after a few moments the front door was opened by Miss Somerfield herself. The servants had all gone to bed.

"Ursula!"

"Yes, Miss Somerfield, please I'm awfully sorry!"



"I'm sorry," Ursula said glibly, "but I've had to leave my bike at your gate. I've had a bad spill." It was hard even for Ursula to keep up the pretence with the dark eyes of the Indian woman seeming to pierce her through and through.



"But only twenty minutes ago we had a message that you were being kept for the night at the bungalow. The lady sent word—"

"I know, but I—I felt I— You see, Miss Somerfield," Ursula pleaded virtuously, "I didn't like the idea of being away all night, although the lady was very kind and all that. I hope you are not angry with me, Miss Somerfield, but I—I have acted for the best."

"You should not have done this, Ursula. The lady having made everything all right—sent word to allay our anxiety—it would have been better for you to stay there. You had a bad spill from a bicycle, I understand, and felt shaken up?"

"Yes, I—at the time I did feel queer. But I—I got better after awhile."

"You look upset," the headmistress commented, in some concern. "Matron will be in bed by now. Everybody has gone up. But if there is anything the matter, Ursula, then nurse must—"

"Oh, no, please! I shall feel quite all right in the morning. The bicycle came off worse than me," said Ursula, which was true enough, even if the grammar might have been better. "I had to leave it at Madame Khan's."

"I must hear more about it in the morning, Ursula. If you are sure you have suffered no real harm—no bruises to be seen to—then you had better go up at once."

"Yes, Miss Somerfield. Good-night!"

"Good-night, Ursula! I wish such things didn't happen. But the road is certainly bad in parts, I know."

With Miss Somerfield staying behind in the hall to lock up, Ursula could safely grin to herself as she mounted the stairs. Altogether she had done the best thing for herself, after all, by "going the whole hog." If she had been only half an hour late, what a rowing there would have been!

As it was, her belated return had passed off so quietly, even pleasantly, that her mind was left untroubled on account of the escapade. She was thinking only of the Burmese people and of the Burmese casket as she climbed the stairs. Who would believe such a thing could have happened as what she had seen? Sherami, seizing the opportunity of trying to sneak into the school!

Suddenly, on the landing that served the Fourth Form corridor of studies, Ursula stood still. She was quite alone, with the lights switched off for the night. If she chose to slip along to Pam's study and have a good look at the casket, no one would ever be any the wiser.

On tip-toe she impulsively sped down the dark passage. Reaching a certain door, she held herself quite still, scarce breathing, so as to listen. Then, convinced that she could safely do so, she opened the study door and silently entered.

Afraid to switch on a light, she peered across to where the casket had been placed, and she saw its gold and mother-o'-pearl tracery shimmering at her in the darkness. With a thief-like tread she moved across to it and took it from the shelf.

No sooner was it in her hands than Ursula knew that she could not bring herself to put it back. She wanted it! Or, rather, she thought of all the things she wanted that it might secure for her.

Drawing off to the door with it, she suddenly

risked switching on a light. Then the casket could be gazed at in all its rich loveliness.

Her eyes noted again the inlaid design—real gold! She saw the rainbow colours of the mother-o'-pearl treatment. It must be very valuable, even if she was all wrong in suspecting that the Burmese people would like to possess it. But was she wrong? Did it seem likely?

Where, then, supposing she took the casket now—where could she hide it? As soon as it was missed there would be an outcry. And if ever the theft were traced to her—well, expulsion would not be the end of her punishment. And yet take the thing she must. It had been made so easy for her to do it.

Out went the light. She crept away, going past her own study door. Not in there! For the present, at least, she must hide the thing. Where? The attics?

A moment's reflection convinced her that she ought to do better than that. Any search for the missing casket would assuredly take place in the attics—all the more so, if the loss were attributed to a "jape" at Pam's expense. And that might easily prove to be the case. It would be like her and her chums to suspect a "jape" rather than a deliberate theft.

She could, however, think of nowhere better than the attics, and so she crept upstairs, past the landing that led to the Fourth Form dormitory. All was darkness and silence in there. She, of course, was not expected back until the morning, and so there had been the usual "lights out."

Then, in the act of mounting higher still, to the unused attics, she noticed the emergency door giving on to the outside iron steps. There flashed upon her the idea—as simple as it was daring—to slip out and down to the grounds! Why not? She was still fully dressed. Miss Somerfield took it for granted that she had gone straight to bed.

Trembling with the excitement of her decision, she cautiously pushed the bar that unlatched the emergency doors. They were just the same as those fitted to theatres and cinema-halls. Then the soft night air was wafting at her again, for she was on the iron stairway that led down to the ground.

Even as she hastened down, she was making up a plausible story to tell if caught in the act or on her return. She had found the emergency door open, and had seen someone making off! Such a story would even cover the loss of the casket!

All the same, she was agasp with excitement and nervous dread as she reached the ground and set off at a run, the casket under one arm. Now that she was clear of the schoolhouse, she knew what to do with her ill-gotten treasure. She would get a spade from the toolshed, dig a hole near by, and bury the casket.

Breathlessly she came to the tiny, stone-walled building that formed a storing-place for gardening tools. A spade came to hand, and Ursula, hastily choosing a spot at random near the ancient walls, started to dig.

But, instead of encountering soft soil, she had driven in the spade not more than three times when its edge grated on a rock-like surface. To find out at once if she had encountered a large rock, or only an easily-shifted boulder, she cleared away a little more earth, then felt in the hole with one hand.

(Continued on page 341.)

## "A SCHOOLGIRL'S TREASURE!"

(Continued from 334.)

As she did so, it gave her a cold thrill to come upon an iron ring, such as might be clamped into a stone slab to enable it to be raised.

What did this mean? What had she come upon now? Here was something that no one had ever known about. She forgot her fears of being caught, even forgot the casket, in the excitement of clearing more earth from the stone—a smooth slab, as it proved to be.

A few minutes' frantic exertions, and she had the whole upper surface of the oblong slab clear of soil. The ring-bolt was well towards one end, and she hoped to have strength enough to raise the stone.

But at first she was quite baffled. Not until she had had recourse to the spade again, using its iron edge for prising here and there, could she get the slab to burst clear. Untouched for years, it had become almost cemented down. By this means, however, she moved it at last, and then, pulling on the ring with both hands, she got the slab to rise on end.

In the darkness, all she could see was a still darker void. What was down there? It was impossible to tell—impossible to make out anything without a light. A well, long forgotten? Or the opening into a cellar, perhaps? Anyhow, she could easily determine whether it would be safe to use this for hiding the casket.

Picking up a tiny lump of earth, she dropped it down the hole. Almost instantly she heard it strike hard ground—not fall plop into water. So Ursula knew that she could safely drop the casket into the hole. It was only a few feet down to the floor of the mysterious cavity.

There, then, in such strange circumstances and at this dark hour of the night, Ursula hid what she had taken from Pam's study. She let the casket

fall, and she knew by the sound which came that it had fallen softly, suffering no harm.

Nor was it more than a few minutes later when she rushed the spade back to the toolhouse. She had replaced the stone slab and covered it with soil. An exhausting task altogether, besides being so agitating, and her pulse was galloping as she warily went back by the way she had come.

Up the winding iron stairway she passed, after seeing that her shoes held no soil. She gained the landing, silently closed the emergency doors, then drew breath.

Not a sound about the house. Safe!

It made her grin craftily to think what she had gone through in the last hour or two, and what she had done, and yet how safe she was.

With the school chimes beating out the late hour over a sleeping school, Ursula came at long last to the Fourth Form dormitory. She refrained from switching on a light as all the other girls seemed to be asleep. Calmly, after so much intense excitement, she undressed.

Her bed was near where Pam Willoughby slept. Last thing of all, Ursula Wade gave a smiling stare towards that sleeping schoolmate. It was a peculiar satisfaction to Ursula that Pam was to be the loser.

"Serve her right!"

With that harsh thought, Ursula settled down in bed. But it was to be a long while yet ere she slept. The excitement had returned, and in fancy she was still down there in the night-bound grounds, struggling to raise the stone slab, whilst beside her lay the Eastern curio which other hands, as covetous as her own, had longed to seize to-night!

Only a handy work-basket, in Pam's careless opinion. But it was something that she would have guarded, treasured, if only she had known!

(END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.)

What is to happen now? What will Pam do when she finds the casket has disappeared? You must read next week's exciting long complete Morcove story to see. Entitled "The Casket of Kangpur," it is just full of absorbing incidents. Order your next SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN now!



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2