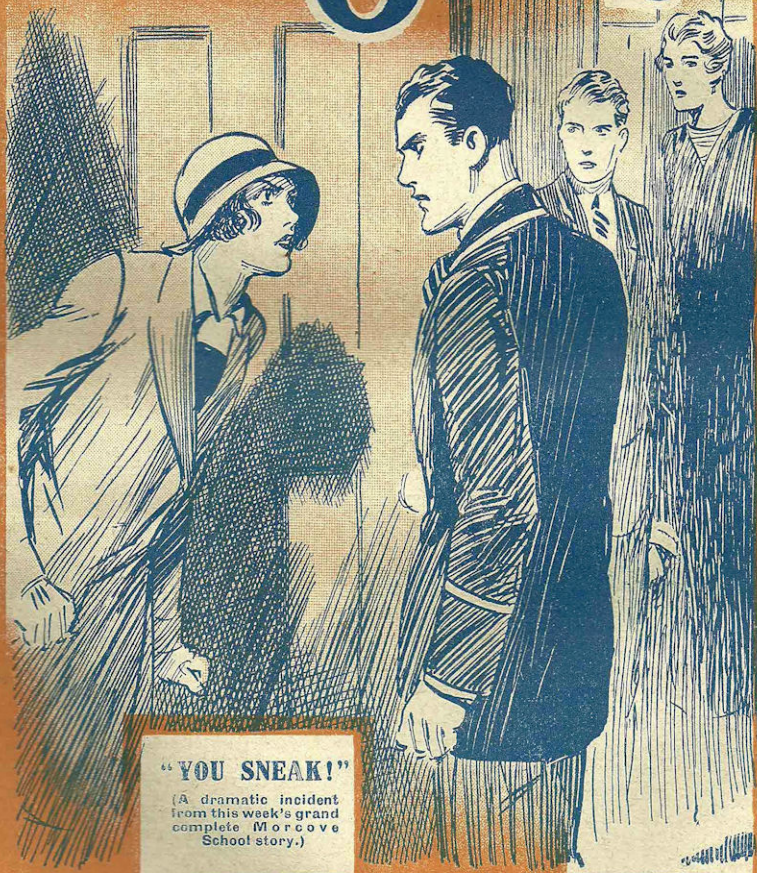


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The SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN 2d



"YOU SNEAK!"

(A dramatic incident from this week's grand complete Morcove School story.)

A Grand Long, Complete Story of Betty Barton & Co.

Her Offence to the Form!



By MARJORIE STANTON

Fresh Anxiety For Polly!

POLLY LINTON'S looks fully expressed her seething impatience as she waited in the corridor at Morcove School to see Miss Everard—the Fourth Form-mistress.

The Form had come out of morning class five minutes ago, and usually Miss Everard made for her own private room directly after the dismissal.

"Why doesn't she come!"
Thus Polly muttered to herself. She knew her Form-mates were mustered in the music-room, waiting for her, and they, too, would be growing impatient.

Ding-dong, chimed the quarter-hour.
"Dash!" Polly said aloud. "And now, if I go off hunting for her, she'll come the moment my back's turned. No, I'll wait. I won't sit down to dinner until I know whether I can have permission to—"

"Ooo, queek, here's Polly!" came a shrill cry that left Polly glaring at a certain schoolmate.

"Allez—clear off!" said Polly wildly.
"But, what ze diggings!" expostulated that dusky Imp, Naomer Nakara. "We have all been waiting for you, Polly! In ze music-room, bekas—"

"Yes, Polly," chimed in Betty Barton, the Form captain, now that she also had appeared.
"Aren't you coming?"

"Presently."
"We can't get on without you, dear; and there was to be a rehearsal at twelve o'clock."

"Yes, I know. But—oh, Betty dear, I must

wait and see Miss Everard about—about something! Take that looney away!"—with a gesture indicating Naomer, who was doing a weird dance.

Naomer stopped dancing, and stared.
"Who is ze looney? Just bekas I rehearse my dance for ze play! If I am a looney for doing that, then you are one, too, Polly, for writing ze play!"

"Oh, clear off!"
"Anybody would zink I had dropped ze brick," Naomer commented on Polly's frantic state. "All right, I go back to ze music-room; and I shall take charge of the rehearsal myself!"

"Come away, dear," Betty advised the Imp. "And, Polly, I'll explain to the others—you'll be up in a minute?"

"I suppose so—yes, Betty. Don't take any notice of me. I—I'm—"

"Looney!" suggested Naomer, as she fled.
Then Betty also effaced herself, with a parting smile for Polly that asked her to forgive Naomer's skittishness, and to try not to get into such an impatient state.

"It's all very well," Polly fumed to herself, pacing up and down.

Torn between her desire to help her brother Jack, who is in dire trouble at his school, and her wish to be loyal to her chums of Morcove, Polly Linton finds herself in a difficult position. And now, to add to her already great anxieties, the Fourth Form misconstrue her actions and believe that she is deliberately "letting them down!"

"They none of them realise. Even Betty doesn't! And that's just where I am up against it. For all they can tell, I am simply— Oh—er—Miss Everard!"

For, at last, the Form-mistress had appeared.

"Polly! But I thought there was to be a rehearsal of the great and

wonderful play after morning school. Won't the others be lost without you?"

"I couldn't speak to you at twelve o'clock, Miss Everard, so I've had to wait for you. And, please," Polly entreated, "would you let me go over to my brother's school this afternoon?"

"Grangemoor School, Polly?"

"It's a halfer this afternoon!"

"Oh, yes; but even if it seemed right to let you off games—Grangemoor School is ever so far away! And what about rehearsals?" smiled the Form-mistress. "Isn't there to be another, after an early tea?"

"Yes, but—"

"I don't know, Polly, but I should have thought you could hardly afford to be absent from rehearsals? You, the composer of 'Merrie Morcove!'"

"Seriously, Miss Everard, I think I ought to go over to Grangemoor School, to see my brother Jack. I only want a few minutes' talk with him, to— to ease my mind about something. He was here for a minute or two last Saturday, you remember—"

"Yes, Polly," nodded the Form-mistress—gravely, as if she also remembered that Jack Linton had no sooner turned up than he was taken away by a prefect.

"Miss Everard, please! I know it sounds a lot to ask; at the same time, it's only because I feel—I feel—well, I ought to go, being his sister," Polly said awkwardly.

The Form-mistress spent a moment changing books from under one arm to another. That moment, however, was probably an opportunity for her to reach a decision.

"It is not the time of year for long-distance runs by bicycle, Polly. I want to do my best for you. If only it were possible for you to go by train; but Grangemoor is just as badly served as we are."

"But, Miss Everard, I'm sure I could bike there and back in the time. After all, it keeps light till half-past six."

The Form-mistress shook her head.

"Miss Somerfield would never approve of your relying upon your bicycle, Polly. Supposing I let Pam Willoughby go with you, her home being at Swanlake—it is quite close to your brother's school?"

"And sleep the night at Pam's? Oh, Miss Everard, that would be splendid!"

"I didn't mean that, Polly," demurred the Form-mistress. "I was wondering if Pam's mother could send you both back by car."

"I'll ask Pam—at once!" burst out headstrong Polly. "But it'll be all right, I'm sure! Mrs. Willoughby is a dear, and they've got heaps of cars. And, anyway, they'll love having Pam home for an hour or two, so— Oh, I'll run and find Pam now!"

"But mind you let me know what's arranged!" the Form-mistress called after Polly impressively. "No going off until I have approved everything."

"Oh, no! Thanks awfully!"

Polly was nearly clear of the passage as she looked back to respond so gaily and gratefully. The music-room was on the first floor of the great schoolhouse.

Her bursting in upon the waiting girls was the signal for a playful, but reproachful, demonstration. Mock cheers were raised, and there was some booing, whilst one skittish junior darted

to the piano and thumped out a grand chord—much to the disturbance of Madge Minden.

"At last, Polly!"

"Boo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes, and you can go away, Polly, bekas—what ze diggings, see me conduct!" yelled Naomer, standing out to start beating time vigorously in front of the mirthful mob. "One, two, three—get ze jerk on, everybody! Opening chorus, queek!"

But the juniors simply could not sing for laughter.

"You're a nice one, really, Polly!" some of them resumed. "How can we get on without you?"

"Very sorry, girls, and all that," laughed Polly, genuinely apologetic. "Too bad of me, I know; but—er—Pam, just a sec.!" she hailed the Swanlake girl.

There was such a babel, Polly felt it best to go outside with Pam for a talk; whereupon the Form in general made a few more remarks.

"Well, I like that!"

"Gone again! Oh, she is the limit!"

"Yes, wather; most twying!" amiable Paula Creel was bound to remark. "When one might be westing, bai Jove; we cupewating ffrom the effects of a most stwenuous mowing in class, what?"

"Attention, everybody!" yelled Naomer. "Madge will now play ze opening chorus—"

"Oh, I don't think so," said Madge, taking some manuscript music from the music-rest, to shake it together as if done with for the present. She stood up and very definitely some of the others also showed their intention to depart. A form or two fell over. Above a great babel was heard the cry:

"Come away, girls! Washout!"

"No, no—just a bit!" shouted the captain soothingly. "Heaps of time yet, girls, so don't be too impatient."

"We've waited and waited," was the loud complaint. "What does Polly mean by it? Does she want to rehearse or not?"

"Of course she does, girls," said Betty; "you know how keen she is—"

"Keen! It looks like it! Now she's gone off with Pam!"

"I resign from ze play, yes," Naomer announced, with an assumption of dignity that left her stalking across the room, nose in air. "Bekas, for one thing, I am not allowed to conduct, and anuzzer thing, I am getting hungry!"

Then Polly came in again, with Pam.

"Hooray!" the Form cheered ironically once more. "Give her a clap! Well, Polly, what about it?"

"Well, what about it?" she retorted, quite her saucy self, now that she had happily arranged the little matter with Pam about going to Grangemoor. "I'm ready when you are, girls."

"We have been ready this last half-hour!"

"All right; I'll double your salaries," promised Polly. "You shall have all the profits from my play! Only let us get going now, for I feel—oh, just ready for a thorough good go!"

"Oh, you really are ready now?" laughed Helen Craig dryly. "Well, well!"

Polly, whose cheerful face was enough to put the disgruntled juniors into good humour, glanced towards the piano. Madge had resumed her seat, and was setting out the music again.

"Take your places, please," playfully requested Polly; and the theatrical party "fell in," about four deep, at the upper end of the room. There was one exception; Paula Creel, instead of falling in, fell down. Some difficulty over getting her up again—Naomer having chanced to fall on top of the beloved duffer—made Polly stride about, impatient of the delay.

"Wowp!" howled Paula. "Gow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You see," stormed Polly; "even when I am ready, you're not! Do you want me to throw up the whole thing?"

"Yes-s-s-s!" dinned some.

"No-o-o-o!" yelled others.

"It won't take much!" Polly threatened them all grimly. "Now, girls," with sudden reasonableness, "come, come! Order! Stand just as you would at the rise of the curtain, and keep your eyes on me! We'll do the opening chorus, just to show there is no ill-feeling. We ought to do most of the chorus parts before dinner. Then, after tea, this afternoon—oh, by the way," Polly broke off blandly, "I shall not be here this afternoon! Er—"

"What?" she was yelled at.

"Sorry, girls; awfully sorry, but I really must go over to Grangemoor School!"

"Why must you go over to Grangemoor?" asked one member of the musical-comedy party, very pettishly.

"I want to see my brother. Er—you wouldn't understand, girls; but—"

"Song, She Wants To See Her Brother!" cried Eva Merrick. "Band, there!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"She can go and see her brother," Etta Hargrove said stiffly; "I don't mind that. But I do think, when we've all kept our time free for another rehearsal—"

"Hear, hear!" voiced many indignantly.

"Ugh!" stamped Polly. "I tell you—"

"You've told us already," struck in Ella Elgood, striding away to the door; "you want to see your brother! Ta-ta, then, and give him my kind regards!"

In vain Betty signed to the girls not to go; in vain she waved to Polly to keep calm. There was pandemonium in the music-room. Polly was shouting at those who were already marching out; but she was not heard, for other juniors, preliminary to leaving in disgust, were marching round the room, rendering an impromptu chorus.

"She wants to see her brother,
Her brother
(Poor brother!)
She wa-a-ants to see her
brother,
So we can't rehearse to-day!"

"And when you do see him," shrilled Naomer, dancing up to Polly, "I hope it will be fine for you! Good-bye!"

"Hooray!" the cheer was given, as the last of them made their exit. "Over again, girls!"

And Betty and Polly, left alone together, heard the absurd chant dying away "off stage" as it were.

After a few moments, the Form captain turned to say a soothing word.

"Never mind, Polly dear. I understand—"
"You don't; I'm sure that even you don't!" muttered Polly, whose cheeks were flaming. "It's—it's—oh! Let me get out of this!"

At Grangemoor!

AT half-past one Polly was in the bicycle-shed, looking over her machine, and there Pam Willoughby came to her.

It was like Pam to be very serene, with little to say, but always retaining a cheerful expression.

"Yes, well, Polly, we can be off now! Machine all right?"

"Oh, I hope so, Pam! What about yours?"
Pam's bicycle was all right. It would be! A fortunate girl, Pam, to be the daughter of the Willoughbys of Swanlake, where life was lived on the grand scale.

But if Pam had the best of everything always, that was no; to say that she had been spoiled. Morcove had never known the least ostentation on the part of their Form-mate. Different from Cora Grandways, whose parents were rolling in money—and didn't Cora let you know it!

Polly and Pam set off at a time when, of course, most of Morcove was flocking into the



Polly Linton entered her brother's study. "Hullo, Jack!" she said, as cheerily as though nothing had been the matter. Jack jumped up. "Polly! What the dickens—!" he exclaimed incredulously.

open, this being a "halfer." Accordingly, there was an echo of the before-dinner demonstration against Polly, partly in fun and partly from genuine annoyance. She was cheered again, and all manner of facetious cries came after her.

Polly could only ride in grim silence.

They were soon on the road running inland, across the moor, that was the route to Swanlake. Barncombe they would not touch, nor would they pass anything but the tiniest of hamlets during the steady two-hour ride—or it might be three hours. A lot depended upon the state of the roads, which received little attention—and upon the behaviour of Polly's bicycle! It was always liable to those sudden disabilities which come of slap-dash ownership.

"Yes, well," said Pam presently, looking as cool as when she started—whereas Polly was already hot. "We've got a fine afternoon."

"Grand," cried Polly, her spirits rising fast. Oh, the relief and joy it was, to be on the way to Jack! Letter-writing had done no good. She was so sure that he was going through a terrible time, and she was determined to find out all about it, even if she could not be of any use to him.

"But I shall be of use, somehow or other," she was saying to herself, as she rode on. "Only let me find out why that prefect is so down on him, and I can do something. I must! It isn't as if he had Dave Lawder to look to, now."

There was another reason for this visit to Grandmoor—Dave Lawder was ill!

"It never rains but it pours!" Polly reflected. "To think that Dave should get packed off to the san. just when Jack most needs the pal that Dave has always been."

"Am I going too fast for you, Pam?"

"Oh, no, Polly. Your bike squeaks a bit!"

"That doesn't matter!"

So they maintained the fast pace which Polly had set, her pedals coming round with a slight grinding noise now and then, and a loose brake jarring at times, whilst Pam simply purred along.

Always as impatient as this, was Polly; but to-day—ah, it was something more than mere slap-dash that was urging her to hurry along.

Maddop she might be, and as fond of nonsense as any girl in the Form; but she could feel the urge of motives such as only a true-hearted girl can know. For the simple reason that hers was such a happy nature, she could not bear the idea of anyone being unhappy. And her brother—what misery she had seen him in last Saturday!

No silly sentiment about Polly; but strongly, if vaguely, at the present time, she felt an urgent call to her brother's side.

It was not that he had appealed for help or sympathy even. Not he! It was just because he had refused to divulge anything in his letter answering hers, that Polly's anxiety had been intensified. Something going on that was not right. That prefect, Gerald Rennard, marking Jack down, goading him, using the authority of a prefect to make life a living misery, following up each cruel attack with a smiling: "Hit back—if you dare!"

On and on rode the two girls; the afternoon keeping beautifully bright for them.

The vigorous exercise helped to clear Polly's mind; she began to think of inspiring ideas.

Gradually there was coming upon her a restored self-confidence. She felt equal to any demands that might be made upon her. Jack to help, the play to be got on with, the rehearsals

to be supervised—as the Form seemed to think she alone could supervise them! Well, she would manage it all!

Such sanguine thoughts made her exclaim, by-and-by:

"This is the last time, Pam, I shall be letting the Form down, over rehearsals! It was an awful pity about to-day; but it won't occur again."

"Oh, I don't suppose they minded really, Polly!"

"Sure you didn't mind—having to come with me?"

"Just as if! It gives me a chance of seeing dad and mother. I had intended, of course, pushing on with those costumes for the play—"

"Yes, I know."

And there the talk lapsed again. For her part, Polly wished she had never spoken just then. No mistake, she had played her schoolmates a low trick to-day. And it seemed so fooling to keep on deploring the fact aloud; only like asking for forgiveness, over and over again.

At long last they came in sight of stately Swanlake—that famous country seat, lying back a full mile from the road, in the centre of a glorious old park. Polly was to part from Pam here, riding on for another half-hour by herself.

They hopped down from their machines opposite the entrance gates to the Swanlake estate.

"Well, you'll be along about five o'clock?" asked Pam. "Mother will have it all arranged, about our going back by car. Good-bye for the present, Polly!"

"I am so grateful, Pam! Cheerio!"

And Polly, remounting, pushed on again.

They were Grandmoor's own sweet-toned bells which she heard, chiming four o'clock, as she did the last lap in the long run. A minute later, and she would have missed the pleasant sight that greeted her, on riding in by the school's main gateway—the knock-off from games, a hundred boys and more suddenly careering away to their various houses.

Her brother's schoolmates! There they went, going in to get some of the mud off themselves, a few so puffed out that they had to lurch along in chummy groups. Some stout knees below some of those muddly "shorts"! Fine fellows, going in to get cleaned up, and then for a great feed in their studies.

Her eyes strayed from the boys to the great range of handsome buildings which comprised this famous Public school. Head's house, with its oriel windows; Little's House, and the fine chapel and the gymnasium; and there was Jack's house, owing to a new name, this term, as she knew. A new master had been appointed to it, and it was "Lethbury's" now. Ah, and right away from all other buildings, there was the san., where Dave was lying. How nice if she could see him for a minute! They might let her.

Half-way up a broad drive, which ran between the two great games fields, she dismounted, to go the rest of the way on foot, wheeling her machine. She was giving the boys time to troop in before her. Bump! She heard a football go, as some fellow took a drop kick, and it went straight up, higher than the highest roof. Then, dead beat though they were, some of the others had to charge one another, to get the descended ball. Thump! And it nearly smashed a window.

Roars of laughter; more bargaining about; some arm-in-arm, so they all went indoors at last, and a stately silence it was that fell upon this schoolboy world, after such a hubbub.

No sentiment about Polly; and yet—there it was again, something suddenly plucking at her heartstrings.

Her brother's school! Her brother's play-mates! She had not picked him out from amongst that joyous mob. If he had been one of them, she was sure she would have spotted him instantly.

For him to be absent from games; it seemed one more sign of life having changed for him of late, and for the worse.

She stalled her machine hard by the Gothic doorway that stood wide open. Mr. Lethbury's house was humming like a hive as she stepped to the open doorway and pulled at a bell chain. Would she see Mr. Lethbury—or his wife, perhaps? Pity—it was a new master now. Jack had always stood so well with the old one. Had the change something to do with it? But surely not!

A trim parlourmaid came forward, trying not to look surprised at finding that this was not some lady from round about, paying a call on the master's wife.

"Afternoon," said Polly. "I'm from Morcoove School—"

"Oh, yes, miss!"

"I'm Miss Linton, and my brother belongs to this house. And I would be so glad to see him for a minute."

"I see, miss. Well, I might ask Mrs. Lethbury. The Housemaster is out at present, but—"

"Oh, must you trouble Mrs. Lethbury? I'm sure it's all right," urged Polly, raising her voice slightly on account of the babel that was filtering down from the boys' quarters.

"Will you come in?" requested the maid, non-committally; and Polly was soon seated in a waiting-room.

Another attack of fuming impatience was threatening her. "Now, don't!" she was saying to herself, having resolved to go on quietly; but, oh, how bothersome were these formalities! She was here; she might be with Jack now! But the maid had hinted that Mrs. Lethbury must be consulted. Phew! Ah, dear!

Suddenly she heard a fellow—a senior, by the sound of his voice—call out from the hall:

"Harris!"

This brought a cheery "Hallo?" from a boy going upstairs.

"Where's Linton?"

"Don't know, Rennard."

"Well, find him, there's a good chap. Tell him I want him!"

Gerald Rennard; out there in the hall—pacing about now whilst waiting for Jack!

With only that closed door between them, she got up from her chair and roamed the waiting-room, breathing fast.



"I don't expect to be allowed to see Dave," Polly said. The nurse shook her head. "No, he's very ill!" she said gravely. "We are writing for his guardian!"

A Perplexing Case.

SUDDENLY she knew that her brother had appeared, for she heard the prefect begin curtly:

"What's the time?"

"There's the time," answered Jack, evidently indicating a clock in the hall.

"I'm asking you what's the time, Linton!"

No answer.

"It's gone four!" Rennard remarked sternly.

"Where are those lines? Done then?"

"No."

"Wha-a-at?"

"I didn't see why I should."

"Oh, that's the game, is it? Force me to take you to Mr. Lethbury about it? Right you are, my son. Much good will that do you," Rennard laughed curtly. "The sooner things come to a head between you and me, Linton, the sooner I shall be satisfied. It hasn't been for my own sake that I have stood such dashed nonsense from you. I've nothing to fear."

A pause, and Polly felt her heart thudding.

"You beauty," she heard Rennard muttering at her brother. "All right. Now I really must speak to Mr. Lethbury about you. Come to my study at six."

The brute!

But now, strangely, Polly heard the tyrant demanding:

"Stop; what is there to smile about, Linton?"

"Only that you keep on talking of taking me before Mr. Lethbury; you never do!"

"You'll go this time, my son."

"Glad to hear it!"

"None of your confounded cheek! Do I have any trouble with the rest of the chaps? Who are you, then—"

"Why, of course," Polly heard her brother say dryly, "I'm the one chap who disliked your being made a prefect!"

Jack must have walked away to the stairs then, for Polly heard Rennard muttering abusively, as if left alone in the hall to watch his victim pass from sight.

A few moments more, and Rennard himself strode away—whistling! Perhaps his departure may have been accelerated by the appearance of a parlourmaid, liable to see him looking so savage.

The waiting-room door opened.

"Mrs. Lethbury is very sorry, but she is engaged and cannot spare even a minute to see you. She says she doesn't approve of sisters calling to see their brothers; but if it is anything very important—"

"It is, of course it is!" exploded Polly. "Would I have come all this way—"

"Well then, miss, I was told, if one of the prefects—"

"We don't want anything to do with prefects! Oh, look here," Polly fumed, "I know my brother's study. I'll slip up without any bother. I must! Be a sport—I mean—"

"Miss, I daren't—"

"I know; but— You've seen me to the door, anyhow," Polly whispered, with a sudden roguish rush to the outer door that left the maid both bewildered and amused. "So, anything I do now—"

What Polly did now was to turn back from the doorway to nip across to the stairs, the maid giving a scared lift and fall of the hands.

Up flight after flight of shallow stone steps raced Morcove's headstrong junior. No one about—hooray! And here was the corridor down which Jack and Dave had their study—the fourth door on the left. She knew! Flashing steps took her to that door. She tapped, turned the knob; had a smile at her lips, and was ready to voice a tender "Jack!" as she entered—and then she found a much older, taller fellow in the study. He was alone, biting at a macaroon as he stood at a nicely laid tea-table; and she stared—no wonder.

"What the—"

"Oh," said Polly, "sorry!"

Of all fellows—Gerald Rennard!

"Hey, though!" he exclaimed, as she backed into the passage. "What are you doing here?"

"I thought this was Jack's study. It used to be."

"Ah," said Rennard, "things are a bit different now—for Jack. But what business have you to—"

"That business is my business," said Polly, and, having withdrawn, she closed the door sharply between herself and that odious fellow.

A younger boy was coming along with a teapot, for a refill at the washing-up sink. Beyond checking some very lively whistling, he would not have let Polly's surprising presence affect a very jubilant mood. But she appealed to him:

"Excuse me. My brother's study? Name of Linton!"

"Oh, Linton! He's gone into No. 7. Last door down on the left."

"Thanks so much!"

She might have been in her own study passage at Morcove, the way she hurried along to No. 7. Another tap—and this time she waited for a "Come in!" before opening the door and entering.

"Hallo, Jack!" said Polly, just as if it had not been such a terrible business, altogether, getting to see him at last.

"Polly! What the dickens!"

And he heaved up from a low chair, amazement chasing away the brooding look which she had found him wearing.

"Oh, I thought I'd come!" she said lightly. "Pam rode with me as far as Swanlake. How are things, Jack?"

"Not so bad. You've not had tea, I suppose? Er—I've had mine downstairs, so I'm sorry there's none on the table, Polly. Didn't seem worth while fagging out the tea-things just for myself. Oh, and how's the play going?"

"Fine!"

"Well, you girls manage all right," he grinned; "what with plays and rehearsals and special leave for a trip like this to see me. I must see about some tea for you, Polly."

"No, Jack; I'm all right. I shall get a cup at Swanlake; I'm to be back there at five. Then Pam and I go home to Morcove by car, bikes tied on behind, I suppose. And now, Jack, I want to ask you—"

"But—five, you say? You haven't much time to spare," he commented in a sudden fluster at her sudden gravity. "I was going to try and see Dave, and I really ought not to leave it too late. You might come along with me at once, Polly."

"Just a minute," she pleaded. "We must have a talk. But how is Dave?"

"Ah, in a bad way, I'm afraid," sighed Jack. "A nasty accident, that was; and they're saying it may be weeks—"

"I am so awfully sorry," Polly said huskily. "Poor Dave. And poor you, too—"

"Oh, I'm all right!"

"In this study now! It's not a change for the better, Jack. It would be depressing enough, even if you had Dave with you, the same as ever. Well, it only shows I did right to come!"

"Er—nice to see you, anyhow, Polly."

"As to why I came, Jack—"

"By the way, heard from home lately?"

"I had a letter from mother this morning. They're all right." A pause, and then, suddenly going close to him to put her hands out to his shoulders: "What is it, Jack? Here, in this school—the trouble between you and—and that prefect? You must tell me!"

"Now, Polly," he said, and sighed. "Oh hang, you mustn't come asking—"

"I've got to know. You were a wretch not to answer my letter properly! I lie awake at nights thinking. I feel that the play, and games, and everything must go. So it's not doing me any good, Jack, not to be told!"

In his silent taking of her hands, to lift them away from his shoulders, he retained them for a few moments.

"Well, I must say," he exclaimed—but he didn't say it, after all, except by a glance that was one of his rare displays of pride in her.

Then he walked about the study—frowning. From neighbouring dens came the murmur of voices, and suddenly there was one great guffawing which would have made Polly giggle, simply to hear it, only she was watching her brother.

At last he turned round, facing her.

"Very well, Polly, you must be told. A new master here—although he's not so bad, by any means; I like to be fair—has made various changes. One thing he's gone and done is to make Gerald Rennard a prefect. Well, I know it seems all right to the House as a whole. General feeling, Rennard ought to have been made a prefect last year. But I—I've no use for the chap. I know him; I'm the only person in all Grangemoor who does know him!"

Jack stood opposite his attentive sister, the table between them, and he took up a penknife, to start stabbing it absently into the table.

"I'm fond of Grangemoor, and it just about got up my nose when Rennard was made a prefect. In fact—well, you're pretty much the same as me, Polly, in that way. What's in your make-up has got to come out."

"Yes," she nodded. "Go on."

"Well, I simply talked freely—like a silly ass, I suppose, seeing that I couldn't state my case against Rennard, being without proof. Yet, I don't know, I simply couldn't help saying what a jolly shame it was, and that sort of thing; and he isn't going to forgive me!"

"Polly glanced cautiously towards the closed door.

"You can tell me, Jack, your reason for saying that Gerald Rennard isn't fit to be a prefect?"

"I could, but I'm not going to," said Jack, making a final throw of the penknife that left it quivering, stuck fast in the table. "Not on your life, Polly! I admit I had no right to go raging round when I wasn't in a position to make a definite charge against him. That was my mistake; and now, of course, I'm paying for it. He's the sort to make a chap pay dearly."

"But it can't go on, Jack."

"Oh, it won't! It's him or me, any day now—at least, I hope so."

"How do you mean, Jack? Any day now—what?"

"One or the other of us—pushed out. But don't look like that, Polly. Even if it does come to my being—sent home—they'll not cut up rough at home. That's one thing about dad and the mater, Polly; where you or I are concerned—eh, Polly?"

She nodded, then suddenly went to a chair and sat down in a distressed way, like one who has received a big shock. Looking across to him, she said tensely:

"We mustn't let it come to that, Jack. Not expulsion—for you."

His face darkened.

"He's a prefect. You understand how that affects the whole thing, Polly. I ought to sit down under his sneers and goadings, and I can't. If only I could get the means of showing him up! But that's just where I'm whacked. If only I could get into Barncombe more often—"

"Barncombe?" echoed Polly, with a start.

Her brother nodded.

"But the cad so works it that I hardly ever get out now. I was stood back from that outing last Saturday. I've not been in this afternoon's team. He's nouncing me about all the time, and the excuse to Mr. Lethbury is that I'm a bad lot.

going to spoil the House unless I'm dealt with. There's no help for me in Lethbury, Polly."

"But all your schoolmates, Jack?"

"They find Rennard all right. I get no sympathy from them—not that I want it. So long as I have Dave; good old Dave, he's the one! A bit of an owl, always swatting and all that, but a pal, Polly; a pal!" He paused. "Take Mike Heriot. It's funny, Mike, and I have fallen out over this. But Dave—not he!"

"I know," she said. "But you haven't Dave at present! Oh, Jack, isn't there something I can do?"

"You!" And he laughed. "My dear old Polly, best thing you can do is not to let this trouble you at all. You'll only end by coming to grief yourself at Morcove. It's my funeral."

She got up, giving a dissenting shake of the head.

"You'd want to come to my help, Jack, at any time. I ought to stand by you. Oh, and I mean to, and yet go on all right at Morcove. I can do everything," Polly said, not boastfully, only very bravely. "Get the school work done, and see the play through, and write to you every day, and—and perhaps, as time goes on, who knows? I may be able to—"

There was a sudden-interruption. They found the door being thrown wide by Gerald Rennard, to let an imperious-looking lady stalk into the study.

No need for Polly to be told who this lady was. Mrs. Lethbury, the Housemaster's wife!

"Tention, Linton!" rapped out Rennard, like a sergeant on parade.

The reproof was quite uncalled for. Jack Linton, whatever his faults or failings, never forgot his manners in the presence of ladies. He had withdrawn his hands smartly from his pocket and stiffened out of any lounging attitude that had been his. But Rennard had spoken whilst this was being done, so that it may well have seemed to Mrs. Lethbury that the boy had needed to be told.

"My sister—"

"Yes, I know," the Housemaster's wife bleakly cut Jack short. "And it is not what I meant at all. Therefore, I must ask your sister to leave—at once!"

Promptly, Polly stepped up to her brother and gave him her hand.

"Good-bye, then, Jack dear, for the present. Glad to have seen you."

"Bye, Polly," he responded thickly.

Polly next turned to the Housemaster's wife, prepared to accept some lecturing remarks in silence. But nothing was said. Not one word! Mrs. Lethbury stood mute and stiff, as if she would do or say nothing until this unauthorised visitor had left.

So, with a shrug that said: "Oh, all right; if it's like that!" out marched Polly.

Rennard very politely offered to close the door after her exit. She saw him bowing and smiling mockingly, and, since she could not very well treat him to a smack across the cheek, she did the next best thing.

"You cad!" she whispered at him, and then marched away.

Sad News I

"Oh dear," Polly sighed to herself, going downstairs.

Then she laughed grimly.

"Never mind: I did see Jack, anyhow!"

And even now it was only half-past four; the chimneys were telling her so, as she emerged from the Gothic porch to recover her machine. She would be at Swanlake easily by five, if not before that appointed time.

Hallo, though! Ugh! Here was the bicycle with both tyres flat!

"Now, what— But it's funny," she frowned, meaning that it was suspicious. As for being really funny—no! That both tyres should have gone down like this, when they had kept up all the way from Morcove!

Some rascal of a schoolboy serving her this trick for a lark? No. That was not the Grangemoor idea of a joke. But Rennard? Ah!

"Why didn't I," she reproached herself disgustedly, "smack him across the face after all! I—I've a good mind to go back and do it now!" She forebore, however. No use making scenes; that would do Jack no good.

Wheeling the machine she set off to walk to Swanlake. Slapdash Polly was always caught without a puncture-repairing outfit, and in any case she would rather walk miles than take off a tyre and fiddle with an inner-tube. Her experience of her own puncture repairs was that they always let you down before you had gone half a mile again.

In a few moments, however, her attention was drawn to a car, starting away from the san. The doctor? That left her with a poignant thought of Dave, and, for all her being so pressed for time now, she felt she must go across and inquire. If that was the doctor just going off, it must have been his second visit to-day, surely? School cases were always seen in the morning.

The bicycle seemed to rattle and squeak worse than ever, now that it was being wheeled along on flat tyres. So, at one moment, a gust of rage against Rennard would sweep through her, whilst next moment she would be all tender anxiety about Dave, and Jack—poor Jack. Really, it was a problem, she said to herself. How lonely her brother had looked, when she took him by surprise in that new study of his.

"Dave must get well again soon," she reflected desperately. "He'll have to!"

Her mind was haunted with one phrase that Jack had voiced tremulously, concerning Dave.

"A pal, Polly; a pal!"

She pressed the button of an electric bell at the front door of the san, which was wide open, letting the fresh air waft in up a flight of spotless stone steps leading to the wards. After a minute's wait a nurse came down.

"If you please, nurse, how is Dave Lawder now?"

"Who are you?"

"Polly Linton, of Morcove School. My brother Jack belongs to Mr. Lethbury's House. I don't expect to be allowed to see Dave—"

"Oh, no; he's very ill," the nurse said gravely, but not hostilely. "We are wiring for his guardian."

Polly experienced a kind of numb feeling. Life—what it was becoming these days!

"We may have to operate," said nurse softly. "It's your brother who is Lawder's best friend, isn't it?"

"Yes," gulped Polly, winking tears away. "I guessed as much from hearing Lawder ramble about a 'Jack' so often. Lawder is known to all your family, perhaps?"

"Yes, nurse. He often spends his—his holidays with us," Polly faltered. "So—remember

me to him, will you, if possible? I'll go. Thank you so much, nurse."

"Not at all. We must hope and pray it will be all right. He's a dear fellow. So patient. Like men I nursed on the Somme during the Great War."

"Oh!

"Oh, Dave—" Polly was murmuring brokenly, going away, still trundling the bicycle mechanically. "Oh, Jack! What are we all coming to!"

At the outer gateway she looked back at Grangemoor School; looked towards Lethbury's, with what loving thoughts for her brother, hard hit, robbed of his one unfailing pal! And then she looked, last of all, at the san. Dave, lying there, thinking of Jack for as long as the poison and the fever would leave his brain to think of anything at all!

There was a car in readiness at the Swanlake porch when she ended her brisk tramp at a few minutes after five.

"If anyone, Pam, wants a bit of old iron, there it is!" laughed Polly, letting her bicycle crash to the gravel now that her schoolmate had run out to welcome her.

"You didn't have to walk all the way here, Polly?"

"Oh, there are worse things than that. Had tea. If so, I can go without, really I can! Let's get away!"

"The idea! Come on in," commanded Pam, and so Polly got the most welcome cup of tea she had even known, sitting there in the drawing-room, with Mr. and Mrs. Willoughby and Pam, a couple of mighty Labradors and a Persian cat.

"My word, Naomer ought to be here," chuckled Polly, as she was offered the tray of tea-time dainties a second time. "Enough to demoralise anyone, Mrs. Willoughby. I had made up my mind to get home to Morcove at once. There's a lot to do."

"So Pam has been giving me to understand, my dear! But how did you find things at Grangemoor?"

"Yes, Polly?"

Pam had turned round eagerly whilst lighting a cigarette for her father.

But Polly did not say much about Jack, either then or when, later, she was being whirled back to Morcove with Pam in the Swanlake car. For it was in Polly's mind now that she would feel so hurt by any lack of concern for Jack, it might cause a coolness, if not a quarrel. And she was shrewd enough to realise that there might very easily be that lack of real concern.

Neither Pam nor any of the other girls had ever seen Gerald Rennard. On the other hand, they all knew Jack well.

"A great strong chap; surely he can fight his own battle! Surely he can hold his own against anyone, Polly?" That was what it would be.

"I am sorry your brother is having a rather thin time," Pam remarked, towards the end of the journey. "Can't imagine his being in any trouble that he can't get out of."

There it was! Not a callous indifference, but simply an inability to imagine jovial, sturdy Jack being a case for anxiety. Polly could tell; Pam probably reckoned that the excursion to Grangemoor had been more the outcome of a whim.

Study 12 had not yet settled down to prep.

Polly could hear many tongues going as she got to the door; and then, as she entered, great cheering!

At least half a dozen girls, who were only here for pleasant gossip, jumped up to cheer and wave teasingly. Naomer, doing a Dervish dance, yelled:

"Hooray, bekas, now for a rehearsal!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Order, order!" Betty half seriously banged upon the table; but Polly laughed.

"Carry on, girls; I don't mind! About rehearsals, any time to-morrow convenient to the Form!"

"But," grinned Elsie Ashby, "we've been rather talking of throwing up the play."

"You had better not!" said Polly grimly. "After I've gone to the trouble of writing it!"

cried Naomer, rushing to hug the madcap. "So, queek, sit down, and you shall have ze refresher before you start, even though you did have ze grand spread at Swanlake! And I suppose you had anuzzer tea, besides, with Jack at his school? And Dave——"

"How is Dave, by the way, Polly?" asked Betty.

The Study 12 four were now by themselves. Naomer had whisked to the corner cupboard to rummage out eatables.

"I didn't see Dave——"

"Good job! Bekas, ceter not fair that you should have two fellows to look after you at tea. But here you are, Polly; make ze start."

"Dave is in a bad way, girls," Polly spoke slowly. "It is a case of poison setting in, or



A girl appeared suddenly and smiled at Polly. "You wanting the Marlowes, miss?" she inquired. "There's no one at home!" Polly paused in the act of knocking. It seemed as though her journey had been made in vain.

"Oh, we're keen enough; it's you!" smiled one of the disgruntled ones of earlier in the day.

"But, Polly, did you see your brother?" asked another, in the act of making for the door.

"I did."

"How nice for both of you!"

"Yes, wather haw, haw, haw!" chortled Paula, from the easy chair. "Most gwatify—Ow, wowp!"

"Well, don't you try it on me," said Polly, as she playfully pulled Paula's hair. "And those of you who don't belong to this study, will you kindly beat it? I want to get my prep. done! I've a lot to do, revising the play afterwards."

"Really?" exclaimed Elsie Ashby, on the way out with the rest. "Bravo, Polly! Girls, she's not going to let us down, after all."

"No, you are not a bad old Polly, after all!"

something. They've telegraphed to his guardian to come down."

"What?"

"There may have to be an operation."

"Howwows!" gasped Paula, sitting aghast. Betty stood staring at Polly, and so did Naomer, with a platter so tilted that the cake was in danger of sliding off.

Silent, in a deathly silent study, Polly dropped down into a chair at last.

Then Naomer as silently turned back to put the cake away.

"I very sorry," she said plaintively. "I am afraid I have dropped ze brick?"

Another great pause.

"I'll have some cake," Polly suddenly remarked, getting up. "I had better have something. I've got a lot to do."

Polly Pushes On!

HER prep, finished, Polly went away to the library to work—for quiet's sake.

She could do this without giving the least offence to her study-mates. They understood that authorship is like no other work in its demand for total absorption of the mind!

So there, in the otherwise deserted library, she sat, busy with all the tiresome revisions, cutting out parts that had been intended for Jack and Dave, writing in fresh stuff. The two boys would never be able to figure as outside characters in "Merrie Morcove." But it was no use getting dejected. Polly laboured on, until Betty came to fetch her away to prayers after the last bell of the day had sounded.

Next morning—up before any of her Form-mates was Polly! She managed a full hour's useful work upon the play before Betty and others burst upon her to drag her off for a run round.

"Bekas, you won't eat any brekker if you don't!" was Naomer's concerned cry.

Polly was feeling fit enough. That was one blessing; she felt grand! She was not the first literary worker to find that she could go on working up the fun in her masterpiece in spite of personal worries. In school, she sailed through the lessons, and was even made to show her work to Naomer, as an example of how it should be done!

Then, at the midday dismissal, Miss Everard herself rang up Grangemoor to inquire after Dave.

The news was that he had had a very bad night, but there was a slight improvement this morning. His guardian had turned up by the same train that had brought a specialist from London. It was hoped to avoid an operation, after all. The case had become as grave as all this, owing to Dave's recent accident injuring a joint where some trouble must have lurked unsuspected.

Polly's spirits benefited greatly by the news of "a slight improvement." As for the Form in general, it took the sanguine view natural to youth, that Dave would go along all right now—of course he would! A strong fellow like Dave! So, whereas there had been great sympathy on his account, saddening all, there was now a reaction to jollity. What about that play? Polly assured them that it was all right about that play. Rehearsal at five, sharp!

At which hour she was one of the first to go down to the music-room, and a fine, thoroughgoing rehearsal she conducted.

Enthusiasm was running very high again, when the musical-comedy party knocked off after two hours' hard work. Polly, at odd times in the last twenty-four hours, had done wonders in the way of rewriting. No mistake, there never could have been any "Merrie Morcove" without her!

Miss Somerfield must have got to know how keenly the juniors were going on with the good work—their own devising, every bit of it! The play itself, composed by Polly Linton; music by Madge—and such music!—scenery by Tess Tre-lawney, and it was some of the best scenery Tess had ever done.

Then there was Pam's supervision of the stage wardrobe, all a part of the fine team-work, not to mention Betty's by no means minor duties of attending to finance, printing, etc., etc.,

By the end of the week it looked as if Betty might even have to see about some bill-posting! For there was a sudden rumour in the school

that Lady Lundy of Barncombe Castle had heard about the juniors' theatrical enterprise, through the headmistress, and was interested.

Rumour had it that Lady Lundy was minded to offer the great hall of the castle for a special matinee of the play in aid of local charity.

Over the week-end it was only a rumour; but the Fourth Form found on the following Monday that it had not courted bitter disappointment by becoming so sure that rumour was right.

Miss Somerfield gave out before morning school that Lady Lundy would be at Morcove later in the day, when her ladyship hoped to have the pleasure of attending a rehearsal.

If the Fourth Form as a whole was ready to bustle to out of school hours to ensure this next rehearsal being a specially finished affair, so was playwright Polly. She had a hearty affirmative for every ambitious suggestion. Why not try to make it a dress rehearsal? Certainly! With scenery? Yes, why not! The music-room was large enough to take scenery. All start in directly after an early tea, and they could do wonders by the time Lady Lundy was due to honour them with her presence.

Then at midday came a letter from Jack, and it was not a mere repetition of the jovially evasive note which Polly had had from him last Saturday morning. In that previous missive, the only grave bit had been in regard to Dave. Now, roading between the lines, Polly felt that certain paragraphs bore vitally upon Jack's own desperate state.

After giving her the latest news about Dave—that the poor lad was really not getting on, and was suffering from extreme exhaustion—there was this for Polly to read with bated breath:

"I wonder if you could call at No. 5, Tanner's Lane, Barncombe, as soon as possible, and find out if the people living there—a mother and daughter—are related to a certain prefect at this school? But don't say that you have a brother at Grangemoor, and, whatever you do, don't ask them point-blank about G. R. If you do, they are certain to deny all knowledge of him, but perhaps you can draw them out, if so, it will mean everything to me."

The agitation that was Polly's now! When she knew so well what her brother meant by that word—everything!

She read on:

"Fancy my having to ask you to do this for me, Polly. It is awful, but for me to go scooting off to Barncombe means expulsion—I'm gated now; he's done it on me worse than ever. Now, Lethbury, too, is putting me through it, so, Polly, don't let me down if you can help it, but I know you won't. Good old Polly, and best wishes re play!!! If you can find out, then I've got him cooked, but don't get yourself into a bother. The 'r' ought to be taken out of 'brother,' don't you think? In my case, anyhow."

There was a postscript:

"They are quite respectable people at Tanner's Lane."

"Polly!" she heard herself being shouted for as she folded and put away the letter, having read it standing near the letter-rack. "Polly!"

"Oh, dash—all right, girls, coming!" She changed from irritability to blithesome willingness, and rushed upstairs.

"They want you in the music-room, dear," explained Betty, meeting the madcap.

"Right-ho!"

And a few moments later she was involved in all the excitable discussion that was going on. What did she say to having the piano shifted, and making the stage at that end, not this? Had she seen Tess? Because Tess wanted to see her about something. Where did she, Polly, think Lady Lundy ought to sit? Wouldn't it be better to get the room arranged now, so as to give more time for other things by-and-bye? And so on, and so on!

"What we feel is, Polly," said Betty, "if we make it a very early tea this afternoon, we might do a rehearsal in front of the rehearsal! Lady Lundy won't show up until six, I'm told."

"Yes, all right—I don't mind—yes—at least," Polly hesitated. "I don't know that I shall be able to start in directly after school. I must go into Barncombe. Sorry; but it won't take me long: I can be back by five at the latest."

Expressions grew ominous again, but Polly could not let that affect her. Jack had said in his letter "as soon as possible." Besides, she felt entitled to snatch the hour or so for herself after the way in which she had kept at the play lately.

"What do you want to do now, Polly—going into Barncombe?" someone voiced the general disappointment.

"I want a bit of time to myself, that's all."

"Oh, cross—"

"Well!"

"Girls!" interposed Betty quickly. "Now, girls, surely Polly's entitled to go if she wants to? After all, back by five means being in heaps of time!"

"Yes, wather; pway let's be we a s o n a b l e, geals," beamed Paula.

"But—" began several, and then Polly lost her temper for the first time for days.

"If there were less fuss about nothing, there'd be less waste of time!"

"All right, Polly," mumbled one of them. "If it is so important!"

"Of course it is important," chuckled another. "She wants to see her brother!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Chorus!" requested Elsie Ashby playfully; and it has to be recorded that the musical-comedy party again rendered that silly

refrain of last Wednesday—this time with music.

Polly stamped out of the room. Maddening! Even though most of the girls were not seriously treating her intended run into town as another let-down, she felt exasperated and hurt.

If only she could have explained to all of them the urgency of her mission! But a detailed explanation was out of the question. Fatal to tell the world about a bit of private inquiry work calling for the utmost discretion and tact. As for a mere vague remark that it was "something to do with Jack"—nothing would be more certain to provoke derision!

Polly was sure that it would be a strain on Betty's decorum, even, to be told only as much as that. The old, old difficulty! For her, Polly, to have to look after a hefty, self-reliant brother like Jack was beyond being taken seriously by the Form.

Miss Everard let them out at three-thirty sharp that afternoon, and Polly, on a borrowed bike, was in Barncombe by four—pretty good going! She was certainly ahead of any other scholars who might be running into the town, and not a soul connected with Moreove did she have to evade whilst making for No. 5, Tanner's Lane.

It was a turning out of High Street, just past the Creamery tea-rooms; one of the quaintest bits of quaint old Barncombe, the half-timbered cottages leaning towards each other from opposite sides of the narrow way. All seemed to be in the occupation of honest, hard-working folk, carrying on home crafts and small, but long-established, businesses.

At No. 1 lived a basket-maker. No. 3, as a brass plate stated, was "Billing, Chimney-Sweep"; and then came No. 5—the home Polly had quested—with "Dressmaker" in the window.

D r e s s m a k e r !
That card in the window meant an inspiration for Polly, ending all uncertainty as to how to introduce herself to the people who lived here, let alone draw them out!

She knocked, with something all the time knocking at her heart. Oh, but what a strange, mysterious thing Jack had asked her to do! What would be the end of it? Sheer salvation for Jack, from what he had said in his letter, if she succeeded—if! But would she?

"Hurry up!" she fumed, plying the knocker again.

She was still waiting when a girl appeared at the door of the next house.



"Betty, are you angry with me, too?" Polly asked. The Form Captain looked her full in the eyes. "No, not exactly, but I don't wonder that the others are," she said frankly. "You're to go and see Miss Somerfield!"

"You wanting the Marlowes, miss?" she asked. "There's no one at home."
"So the name was Marlowe. A help, anyhow, to have been told that."

"Think they'll be long?" asked Polly.
"Oh, no, miss; what it is, I expect they've done a bit of dailying to-day, both of them together. They does so at times, I know," confided Miss Billing. "There's not much in the dressmaking, I fancy. When they goes out to work, they generally gets in a bit before five."
"I'll look back," said Polly. "Thanks."

The Price of Her Loyalty

A CAR passed Polly as she hurried along the High Street to the post office—Lady Lundy's car on the way to Morcove! But Polly would not let herself feel perturbed. Plenty of time yet!

Meanwhile, it was a happy thought to slip into the post office and get a stamped envelope, and address it to Jack at Grangemoor School.

Thus she would be able to drop him a line immediately she had finished with the Marlowes. She addressed the stamped envelope at the telegraph desk, appropriated a telegraph form as something on which to scribble her message presently, and then returned to Tanner's Lane.

Not home yet, even now, the Marlowes. To and fro, Polly paced; to the end of the short by-street, and then back again. If ever there had been a time for her impatient disposition to assert itself, this was such a time! But her multiple interests and anxieties had made her realise lately that she simply must try to go on calmly.

And she waited, painfully aware that she could never be back at school by five. Still, a few minutes didn't matter. What did matter was that she should pay regard, at all costs, to that urgent note in Jack's letter: "as soon as possible."

He had not underlined those words, but they seemed to be italicised in her brain. When she had longed, prayed to be able to help him—how could she afford to throw away this chance?

"I'll wait till five, anyhow," she said to herself. "Then I really must go."

But at five o'clock she found herself quite unable to leave. At any minute now, surely, mother and daughter would show up.

To the end of the street and back once again. Still no sign of them.

"Dash!" Polly fumed, at last.

Lady Lundy, at the school, must be having tea with the headmistress now. But Betty herself had said that it was likely to be nearly six before her ladyship was escorted to the music-room by the headmistress. The girls, of course, were all as busy as could be at this very moment, and Polly could imagine the grumbling on account of her not being back.

"But I don't care," she muttered. "How can I help it! I must think of Jack. Let him know by to-night's post, and— Oh, come on, come on!" she ragingly apostrophised the overdue Marlowes.

They did not come. Half-past five sounded from the Town Hall; a quarter to six, and Polly was still desperately waiting. She was still there to hear the iron-tongued bell beat six at last. And then she resigned herself to the cruel conviction that it was not to be!

Her luck was out, and all for nothing had she risked the Form's displeasure!

Back to Morcove she rode as fast as possible, overtaking many a senior and many a Fifth Form girl. There were whole droves of those slowly back after a run into town. But as for juniors—no. They, as she knew only too well, were all within doors, thronging the music-room.

Breathlessly she dismounted at the cycle sheds, slammed the machine aside, then pelted across to the schoolhouse.

Half-past six!

"Well, it couldn't be helped!" she was gasping, as she ran up to the music-room.

That the music-room, as she ran towards its closed door, seemed very quiet, did not surprise her. They were all there, of course, possibly keeping very quiet whilst Lady Lundy spoke a few words of praise and encouragement, after seeing part of the rehearsal. Thinking thus, Polly opened the door gently and slipped in very quietly.

And the great room, in deepest gloom, was utterly deserted.

Not for a full minute did she turn round to come away from the significantly empty room. Such a shock had its desolation given her.

At last, however, she went the floor higher to the Fourth Form quarters and passed down the corridor to Study 12, meeting no one. She entered, and Betty was there, but only Betty.

"So there you are, Polly?"

"Yes. There was no rehearsal, then?"

"How could there be—without you? I wanted them to make a start, but they all said it was no use without you. We were in the thick of an argument when Miss Somerfield turned up—with Lady Lundy."

The Form captain did not seem to want to say any more. She got on with what she was doing at the study table.

"M!" said Polly presently. "Well, there it was! Betty, are you angry with me, too?"

"No, Polly, not exactly angry. But I don't wonder that the others are."

"Lady Lundy—I suppose she's offended? And Miss Somerfield?"

"You're to go and see Miss Somerfield. After this, I'm afraid it's all off about doing the play at Barncombe Castle. There is talk, in fact, of dropping the play altogether."

Polly sighed.

"It didn't seem any use telling even you why I had to go into the town, Betty. It was something to do with my brother. I am not at liberty to say more."

"No, dear; very well. Only, even if Jack has some battle to fight, what none of us can understand is why he can't fight it himself—a fellow like Jack!"

"I know," Polly nodded dully. "That's just it. You—you can't understand. Well, I must go and see Miss Somerfield. I don't mind!"

And, straightening out of a slack and weary attitude, she went from the study.

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

Circumstances appear to be dead against Polly. What can the headmistress want with her? Does it mean that the play, about which everybody has been so keen, will have to be abandoned? Be sure to read next Tuesday's enthralling long Morcove story: "POLLY LINTON'S DOUBLE PROBLEM!" Order your SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN in advance.