

"HER DANCE IN THE LIONS' DEN!"—Complete Inside

# The SCHOOLGIRLS' 2<sup>D</sup> OWN



**"Keep Out of Here  
Polly Linton!"**

A dramatic incident  
from this week's fine  
LONG complete Mor-  
cove story.

No. 769, Vol. 30.  
Week ending  
November 2nd, 1935.  
EVERY TUESDAY.

"HER HARUM-SCARUM HIGHNESS"—Complete Fun-Story

Magnificent LONG COMPLETE Story of The Chums of Morcove, Recounting

# SACKED *through*



## Helping Hands

**POLLY LINTON** was very excited about something this morning.

She always did pass up or down the Form's study corridor, at Morcove School, at a bit of a gallop. But at this moment there was more than her madcap nature to account for her eager dash to a certain study which two of her best chums shared.

"I say, Tess! I suppose you haven't—"

"Yes, I have, Polly—"

"What, finished it! Oh, splendid! Let's look!"

And Polly bounded to the study table, on which a big drawing-board sloped, bearing a placard-like work of art—fine sample of Tess Trelawney's skill with the colour-box.

Tess had been all by herself in the study, rinsing water-colour brushes, when Polly bounded in.

Madge Minden, who shared the "den" with the Form's gifted young artist, was getting some before-school piano practice in the music-room.

"Stunning!" Polly emitted, looking enraptured. "It's fine, Tess!"

"Oh, it isn't!"

Tess had the true artist's inclination to feel that anything she did might have been done so much better!

Aware of this, and of Tess' looking as if she would like to tear the whole

## "POLLY LINTON— TAKE WARNING!"

A threat which Polly, the unwitting cause of the girl's dismissal, has startling reasons to remember.

thing up, Polly promptly took possession of the drawing-board, to which the "poster" was pinned.

"Right," said Polly. "As it is finished—"

"Hi, come back, Polly! It isn't dry yet!"

"I shan't smudge it! I—"

"But I don't want it to be shown round!"

Polly, rushing out of the study with the work of art, laughed. The idea of Tess not wanting the poster to be seen, when it had been devised as a flaring announcement for all Morcove to behold, was too funny for words.

To Study 12 ran Polly—that miscalled Abode of Harmony of which she was a co-tenant, along with Betty Barton, Bunny Trevor, elegant Paula Creel, and dusky Naomer Nakara.

"Girls! Look—look!"

"Oh, I say!" cried Betty.

"Topping!"

"Yes, bai Jove!"

"Bekas—seemply gorjus!"

Polly carried the drawing-board to the window-sill and stood it there. Thus placed, what it held met the eyes of three other girls as they now drifted into the study.

"Hallo!" And Judy Cardew's pretty brows went up. "Oh, that's a treat!"

"They can't miss seeing that!" was Helen Craig's emphatic comment.

the Dramatic Things Which Happen When an Innocent Servant Girl is—

# A SCHOOLGIRL

"Tess always does get just the right effect," said tall Pam Willoughby admiringly.

"Has the captain seen it?" asked Betty. "No! I only grabbed it in case Tess might take it into her head to tear it up," Polly gaily explained.

"Better take it round to Etta Hargrove," Betty advised.

As the girl who might herself have been Form captain at this time, only she had preferred to let another have an "innings," Betty was all for bearing Etta Hargrove's position in mind.

Tess Trclawney, in response to a request for a poster advertising an intended "stunt," had done far more than turn out a mere large-lettered announcement.

The lettering itself had been beautifully done in several colours. It said:

## "COME IN YOUR HUNDREDS!

In connection with the Special Effort being made for the Barncombe Childrens' Hospital, there will be a

### GRAND AUCTION SALE

In the Gymnasium  
at 4.30 p.m. to-day.

NO RESERVES! TREMENDOUS BARGAINS!  
Auctioneer: POLLY LINTON.

REFRESHMENTS FREE!

But Tess' artistry had done wonders in the way of decorative borders. By means of coloured pictures, she had shown the Grand Bargains going in at one end, as it were, and coming out at the other end as a flow of money.

In the top left-hand corner was a recognisable picture of the official auctioneer, hammer in hand, and at the bottom right-hand there was a little child in a hospital cot, with pound notes and silver and coppers cascading on to her blankets!

"It's the goods!" Bunny sparkled. "Take it along, Polly; get Etta's approval of it, and then

"Stick him up, queek, yes!" yelled Naomer. "Bekas, no time to be lost! As for me—"

And she whisked to the corner cupboard—not, for once, to provide herself with any before-school snack.

It had been Naomer's own bright idea to offer those free refreshments. She had been playfully warned not to eat all the stock herself. In view of the large numbers likely to be attending the sale, she would have to provide a large quantity of refreshments. There was some chuckling by Bunny and others as the dusky one now visited the corner cupboard to inspect the latest state of her larder.



By Marjorie Stanton

"I like the way Tess has displayed 'Refreshments Free!'" said Bunny.

"Think there will be enough to go round, kid?" Betty called across to Naomer, who was inspecting the shelves with manifest anxiety.

Naomer's failure to respond was significant of a growing concern, and her chums exchanged more winks and grins.

"I'm positive the whole school will be there," Helen said loudly. "It's such a good time to catch all the girls—after tea!"

"The Fifth will roll up, any how," Judy predicted.

"And it will be a long sale," Pam nodded.



"About half-past six—that will be the time for bidders to begin to feel really hungry," said Bunny. "Thirsty, too! The excitement—"

"Ah, bah," said Naomer, coming out of the cupboard, "I am not going to worry about what to give zem to drink! Bekas, I can soon make jugs of my grand patent clove cordial—"

"Some of them may prefer coffee," Helen gravely remarked. "You must provide a choice!"

"Not ze bit of eet! Eef zey don't like my special make of hot drink, zen zey can jolly well go without! Anuzzer thing, I don't see why ze Fifth Form should come in free over refreshments. Our Form, that is quite all right, but—"

"You should have said so, then!" Betty mock-seriously exclaimed.

"Yes, bai Jove! Weally, Naomer, I don't see haow you can—er—diffentiate!"

"What ze diggings, all right zen, I don't care! There shall be enough for all. Only, it means I must go into Barncombe, to ze Creamery, and buy—"

"No sense in that!" Judy remarked. "You had better give the money direct to ze Hospital Fund!"

"Not ze bit of eet," Naomer strenuously dissented. "Bekas, ze more refreshments zero are, ze more ze girls will turn up! Zat is ze whole idea. To attract everybody. Bekas, nuzzing like refreshments, too, for putting zem in a good humour and making them inclined to bid up! You leave eet to me—"

"We must, I'm afraid!" Betty said, whilst winking again at Bunny and others. "Any rate, for the present—school!"

The bell for classes was ding-linging, downstairs. Those chums who did not actually belong to Study 12 at once ran off to get their books together. Polly had not come back, and was not likely to do so now. Accordingly, Betty collected things that the madcap would require in class, along with her own.

"But I wonder!" cried Bunny, hurriedly gathering up her books and primers—"I do wonder how much the sale will bring in! Quite a lot, perhaps!"

"I hope so," Betty blithely responded. "We all love an auction—it's always such fun! And this is for a very good cause."

"Yes, wather, bai Jove! And I fow one shall wejoice, geals," beamed Paula, from her easy chair, "if the proceeds amount to a considerable sum!"

"Come on, kid—school now!"

Naomer was back at the cupboard. She had been downstairs, and as a result of the sight she had seen round the noticeboard, she had rushed back upstairs again to the cupboard, and now she was experiencing a feeling of anxiety which was not to be dispelled.

For in the front hall, on the ground floor, round the attractive placard which had already been affixed to the green-baize board, Naomer had seen a huge crowd, and many remarks had told Naomer of the special interest that was being taken in the offer of free refreshments.

From the headmistress downwards, all Morcove School was wishing good luck to the local committee, of which Lady Lundy was the president, in their effort to provide a special fund for a much-needed extension of the hospital. Every Form in Morcove had promised to do its best; and now—

But Polly's Form was one Form that had shown real enterprise! Study 12 had determined that its Form—THE Form!—must be the one to get in most money.

As for the chums' own Form-mates, every one

of them who counted for anything was wild with delight. At the midday dismissal, Miss Merrick, their Form-mistress, had a few words to say, wishing the praiseworthy venture all success; and then—the cheering!

"I shall hope to be there myself," Miss Merrick smilingly added. "To pick up a few bargains!"

"And sample the free refreshments," rejoined a voice which sounded like Bunny's. "Naomer's promised no one shall go short of refreshments, Miss Merrick."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Naomer found many a girl turning her way, making pretence of sipping coffee and biting at sandwiches—just to remind her of what was expected!

### Hectic Preparations

"HOW do we begin to look, Betty?"

"Fine!"

It was twenty minutes after school had ended for the day, and Polly was officially in attendance at the gym, to receive all those "tremendous bargains," which were being rushed across from the schoolhouse.

Already a vast medley of objects, rummaged out by their various owners, formed a glorious jumble at the upper end of the gymnasium, where Polly was to have her rostrum. And still the steady delivery of potential lots was continuing. And there was very little evidence of girls getting rid of their "rubbish." Most of the gifts were articles of good value generously given by their donors.

One after another girls were coming in, more or less heavily-laden, and going out empty-handed. It was all done, too, in a joyous manner, and, indeed, there was so much joking and laughter that you had to shout to be heard.

"I shall make up little parcels of goods and sell some of the things in lots," Polly shouted to Betty.

"Yes!" screamed back Betty above all the din.

"Or I may offer special Tuppenny Collections!" was the official auctioneer's yelled afterthought.

"That's it!" from Betty, at the top of her voice again.

Polly had persuaded her best chums to come along to see the stuff brought in.

Now Pam came in, and Betty and Polly nudged each other as they saw what she had brought to the sale.

It was a valuable Queen Anne silver teapot that Pam had brought away from Swanlake for use in her own study. All her tea-things were exquisitely lovely antiques. Her mother had said: "Yes, dear, go ahead!" at the time when Pam was thinking of making her study look nice.

"Gracious, Pam! I shan't like to put that up for sale!"

"Oh, why not?"

Pam's serene answer was only just audible to Polly and Betty, who had put themselves close beside her as she set down her offering.

"Worth pounds and pounds—must be!" Polly gasped. "There isn't a girl who can dream of—"

"Oh, let it go for the best it makes," smiled Pam.

"It makes good tea—we know that!" Betty chuckled. "Jolly good of you, Pam!"

"Miss Merrick would like it, I happen to know that," Polly grimly decreed. "I shall keep it back until Miss Merrick has turned up."

Meanwhile, considerable additions to the auctioneer's dump were being made. Even a bicycle was brought in.

Sports gear, of course, was largely in evidence, and several stamp collections and autograph albums were to be offered, also some unopened boxes of chocolates, fancy boxes of soap, and at least one first-aid box.

No sooner, however, had the school chimes ding-dong'd four o'clock, than the inflow of gifts ceased. Tea was to be very punctual this afternoon, on account of the sale. Polly could officially close the gymnasium and scamper with some of her best chums to the schoolhouse, there to get tea for once at the Form's table.

Betty and Co. had decided not to have tea in their study this afternoon. For one reason, they did not want to be bothered with the laying of it.

Another reason was that Naomer, by now, was in a bit of a panic about the promised free refreshments.

She had, in fact, commandeered everything in the corner cupboard that would, in the ordinary course, have served the chummary for tea. And even so she was reckoning to have to go on her knees to cook, in the school kitchen, to come to the rescue.

Privately, Naomer's chums were agreed as to how they would help her to discharge a responsibility so rashly assumed. But they saw no harm in still telling the dusky one that it was "her funeral"! After all, if she did, in her imagined crisis, get round cook, so much the better.

From those others studies which were tenanted by various members of the "chummary," cakes and buns and other eatables were swiftly forthcoming. In the short space of three minutes Study 12 itself looked like a canteen.

And then suddenly Naomer came prancing in, clapping her hands as she ran.

"Bekas—gorjus!" she breathlessly yelled. "Seemply wonderful!"

"Eh, what?" Polly voiced her general surprise.

"But what's all zis stuff!" Naomer panted, taking delighted notice of the collected dainties. "What ze diggings, bekas—"

"Oh, they're just a few things we have scraped together," Helen said lightly. "To help you out of the difficulty."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, much obliged, I am sure," said Naomer, helping herself to a cream-bun. "I zink now there will be no difficulties, bekas—"

"Because what?" stormed impatient Polly. The dusky one's pausing to take another relishing bite was rather trying to the madcap.

"Ah!" said Naomer, "you wait and see! Bekas, cook has been a real sport—she has, yes! I am to have all ze stuff I want, and zere is to be a proper buff-eat in ze gym—"

"A wha-a-at?"

"Don't you know what a buff-eat is?" said

Naomer, meaning "buffet." "Like a refreshment counter at a railway station! And what's more"—taking a third bite at the cream-bun—"I am to have one of ze maids to help me serve!"

"Never!" gasped Bunny and others.

"The new maid!" Betty exclaimed. "That's the girl who was taken on last week—Effie Barnard!"

"A Barncombe girl," Judy chimed in; "a nice girl, too, I believe! At least, from what little we have seen of her—"

"Oh, yes," Bunny heartily agreed.

"H'm!" Betty coughed, for at this very instant she was aware of Effie Barnard presenting herself, a little hesitatingly, in the study doorway.



There was much hilarity as Bunny Trevor, in a battered bowler, and Helen Craig, adorned with a check cap, acted as porters and held up the various "lots" which were to be auctioned to help the hospital.

"If you please, I can't get into the gymnasium," she said. "Cook has asked me to take some food there, and I've been told you have the key—"

"Oh, yes!" Polly cried. "Here we are, Effie—when I can get it out of my pocket!"

The maid smiled as the scholars laughed at Polly's struggling with a very large key, entangled in the pocket. As it came out, a quite small key fell to the carpet, and the madcap pounced to pick it up.

"You don't want that one, Effie," she jested. "That's the key of my safe, where I am going to put all the money that the sale will bring in!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shan't be able to go to the bank until the morning," Polly rattled on nonsensically. "But I think perhaps my table drawer will hold the money. If not—I shall use the corner cupboard, if Naomer's got rid of all her food!"

But Effie had the gymnasium key by now and withdrew.

"We'll all be down there in a minute," Polly called after the new maid.

But Naomer, bolting the last morsel of cream-bun, meant to be off there and then. Using a tea-cloth as wrapper, she put together all the cakes and other eatables and, shouldering her delightful load, made her lively exit. Said Polly then:

"She is rather nice."

"Who—Naomer?"

"Don't be silly, Bunny!" stamped the madcap, who never would confess her own love for the dusky one. "I mean Effie Barnard. I do hope she stays in her situation."

"Yes," Betty nodded. "She's a good sort, and she is very lucky to get a job here, the school's serving staff is like one big family. No reason why she shouldn't have got a job for life, with good chances of promotion."

Polly glanced at her wrist-watch.

"Well! Time's getting on! I, anyhow, must go down now."

This meant a general exodus from Study 12. Nor were the chums all to themselves as they went downstairs. The occupants of many another study, in great excitement over the coming auction, were also making betimes for the gym.

"Say, Polly, you'll want a mallet, for knocking down the lots!" Betty mirthfully realised, when the ground floor was reached. "I'll run and get you one."

"Oh, thanks!"

Whilst Betty was fetching the mallet she met Effie Barnard again, carrying a large basket to the gym. The basket was one of those shallow, open ones, such as go to the clothes-line on wash-days. Cram-full as it was with food intended for the free buffet, it was just about as much as Effie could carry, staggering along with it held in front of her.

"Oh!" Betty laughed. "Let me, Effie! The two of us together!"

"Thank you, miss," was the shy and breathless response. "Cook has put in a lot of stuff, and no mistake."

The packed basket now went upon its way a-dangle between Betty and the new maid. Betty had found the wanted mallet, and she brandished it in a "Hands off!" manner as various girls, guessing the contents of the basket, playfully threatened to swoop upon it en route.

"Your home's in Barncombe, isn't it, Effie?"

"Yes, miss. No. 8, Tanners Lane, just off the High Street."

"Oh, I know it."

Betty was seizing the chance of a quiet moment, on the way to the gym., to display a friendly interest.

"You've got a father and mother, Effie?"

"Only mother now, miss," very softly. "Father died a year ago. There's mother, and my sister

Kate, and my little brother Johnny. He's quite little—doesn't go to school yet."

"And Kate?"

"Oh, she's older than me and should be in a job, only she can't get one. That's why I'm so glad to have got a place myself. It's been hard on mother, since father died. She can't always get a full week."

"Do you think you'll like it here at the school, Effie?"

"Oh, I'm certain I will. I'm very happy here! Seems too good to be true, sometimes; as if—as if it can't last!"

"No reason at all, Effie, why it shouldn't. And I'm sure you'll be happy every hour of the day. We girls know how contented the staff must be, because nobody ever leaves, unless it is to get married. But here we are!"

Even then, at the gymnasium entrance, Betty would not have left Effie to grapple alone with the basket, but suddenly Naomer was in evidence. She took on in Betty's place, helping Effie to get the provisions to a lower corner of the big building, where a trestle-table had been erected for the serving of the free refreshments.

How the catering preparations went on at that lower end of the gym, Betty for one had scant idea, during the next few minutes. She was with Polly and other chums, at the upper end, where a deal table, with a small desk superimposed, was the very realistic rostrum.

All the chums were busy, marking the goods with numbers and sorting out the numerous lots. As official auctioneer, Polly liked to have her own best chums acting as clerks and porters. And Bunny, as one of the porters, had found a green-baize apron to put on. She had found an old bowler hat she was wearing, and desired to be addressed as "Bill," and Helen Craig, who had donned a cloth cap, discovered somewhere, was Bill's mate, and liked to be hailed as "George."

At the last moment, there was such a crowd in the gymnasium that a good many of the lots stood a good chance of being trodden upon. Already a girl had got herself so mixed up with the bicycle that her extrication from it had been a matter of great hilarity.

So one of the thick gymnasium ropes was used to ensure deep silence. Betty and Pam got the rope stretched across tightly and securely tied, and then—

Loud cheers as Polly was seen to be climbing on to the table, to take her stand behind the desk! No sooner was she up than she grasped the wooden mallet and brought it down with a terrific whack!

The sale was starting!

Going, Going—

**W**HACK! again went Polly's hammer, to ensure dead silence.

"Now, girls! Before I make a start with the offer of these rare bargains, these chances of a life-time, some of them perfectly priceless—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I think, girls, we ought to get the captain to say a few words?"

"Yes, yes!" dinned the crowd of intending bidders. "Etta! Come on, Etta!"

Polly stood aside on the table, and up clambered Etta Hargrove—not at all eager to come to the fore, even for a minute or so; but the clamour had been too insistent to be ignored.

Betty led the clapping, which Polly allowed to

**SCHOOLGIRLS  
WEEKLY**

Every Wednesday

continue for some thirty seconds at least. Then the hammer whacked again for silence, and Etta gave a brief but happy speech, wishing the sale every success.

"Hurrah!" and tremendous clapping as Etta, having finished, jumped down from the table. "Hooray! Bravo! Well done, Etta!"

Whack!

"And now, ladies and gentlemen—"

"Gentlemen, where?" Polly was mirthfully challenged by several girls.

"There!" And the official auctioneer pointed to Bill and George.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Whack!

"Order, please!" Polly vociferated. "Conditions of sale! Highest bidder to become the purchaser! All disputes to be settled by the auctioneer, whose verdict shall be final! All lots to be cleared away directly after the sale—"

"Oh, oh!" and laughter.

"Lot One!" shouted Polly, flourishing her mallet, whilst Bill held up six old books tied round with string. "How much for these first editions? Come on now, don't be slow! A genuine investment for the discerning collector!"

Peals of laughter were followed by a voice from the back offering:

"Threepence!"

"Threepence, then!"

"At threepence, going! I shan't wait! For the last time—going! At threepence—gone!"

Polly was certainly being professionally brisk. She was leaving it to Betty, as clerk, to get the buyers' names. Lot Two at once came on show, held up by George. A damaged tennis racket, two golf-clubs and a bathing costume—a nice sporting lot," in the words of the auctioneer, and it went off briskly at two shillings and ninepence.

"Lot Three! A lady's bicycle—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Even Polly's stentorian voice was lost in the shrieks of laughter which went up as Bill and George, between them, held the machine aloft for inspection.

"How much for this handsome machine, with chain and nickel-plated handlebars all complete, I mean all bent! What a bargain for somebody!" Polly said enviously, as if she wished she could afford it herself. "Don't riss such a chance!"

Much derisive comment, coupled with a complete absence of bids, gave Polly to understand that she was welcome to "buy in" the awful relic for her own use. With a sigh, however, she stated that that would be "against the rules"!

"Half-a-crown!"

"Oh!"

There was quite a sensation. Ethel Courtway, Morcove's head girl, had made this noble offer. It came as a welcome example, at the very start of the sale, of the spirit that was needed. Ethel was loudly cheered when the bicycle fell to her—and fell literally. It was, in fact, dropped at her feet by the porters.

After that, Polly was able to work off numerous lots of pure "clobber" at a brisk rate. Betty had to be as quick as lightning to get buyer's names and prices as the knocking down went on. Highest bids were seldom for more than a few pence. One attempt to "spring" the bidding by another farthing was received with yells of delight.

"Lot Twenty-three! A pocket-torch, three cakes of toilet soap, a fountain-pen and a ready-reckoner! How much? Hold 'em up, George!" the energetic auctioneer admonished that porter.

(Continued on the next page.)

THE SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN. No. 769. Vol. 30.

Week ending November 2nd, 1935.

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MY first item of news this week must concern forthcoming features, for I know how deeply interested you all are in learning what is being got ready for your enjoyment in future issues of SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN.

Firstly, I am certain there will be a warm welcome for Miss Pauline Stewart, for most of you will remember with delight that fine story she wrote for us entitled: "Her Voyage of Mystery."

In next Tuesday's issue, Miss Stewart's new story commences in our pages, and it bears the intriguing title of:

"The Vanished Stage Star."

As the title implies the story deals with the stage, and what more fascinating subject is there? As for the heroine, Jill Romney, you will like her the very first moment you encounter her. More than that, you will admire the splendid way she deals with the astounding situation she encounters.

And what a situation it is!

Jill and her partner Juliette are at the top of the ladder, popular favourites, and suddenly, like a bolt from the blue, comes disaster. Jill finds herself no longer wanted—she must start all over again, on her own!

Of course, there is a reason for this, and it is that reason which causes Jill to embark on the strangest task of her career. I will not spoil your enjoyment by telling you more of the "plot" of this grand new feature, but I do strongly advise you, my readers, not to miss a word of the opening chapters. Once you have read them, you will long to read what happens next. That's the kind of story Miss Stewart's is.

Then, the week after next, a splendid new series begins in SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN. Written by the popular Louise Carlton, this series deals with the enthralling adventures of Anita, the girl who runs a school for animals—but, of this, more next Tuesday.

#### OUR SECRET SOCIETY

I am more delighted than I can say at the way this idea of a SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN Secret Society has caught on. My postbag has grown enormously the last few weeks, and every letter mentions the Society in enthusiastic terms.

One or two readers missed the original announcement, and for their benefit I am repeating on p. 529 the Secret Code, the Rules, and the Code of Honour. Will every reader please make a copy of these, or cut them out for future reference.

Finally, next Tuesday's issue of SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN will contain a splendid long Morcove story, entitled "Her Plot Against Polly," by Marjorie Stanton; another grand instalment of "An Outcast—on Mystery's Trail," and fine COMPLETE stories of Maureen Martin and "Her Harum-scarum Highness"; so order your copies in advance and then you won't be disappointed.

John deuter gettes,

J.B.H.E. RSTIRE.

"Fourpence I'm bid—fivepence! Will someone make it sixpence? Thank you! Sixpence—sevenpence, over there in the corner!"

"Eightpence!" and clapping. Quite spirited bidding, this!

"Useful lot," Polly recommended it. "You use the soap, then you shine the pocket torch to see yourself; then you use the ready-reckoner to calculate how much younger it has made you look! Then you use the fountain-pen to write down the answer! Ninepence, thank you! At ninepence, then"—whack!—"sold again!"

At last the more important lots were reached, and time after time bidding went to a figure which left the final tussle between seniors.

There was a goodly attendance of Sixth Form girls, and they could go on bidding after younger scholars had had to drop out. Ethel was still buying, and several of her boon companions of the Sixth gaily competed against one another for the sake of swelling the grand total.

There was a genuinely appreciative "Oh!" when at last Bill, busy in green-baize apron and bowler hat, held up the lovely piece of antique silver donated by Pam.

"And now!" Polly shouted, her voice being as strong as ever. "Here you see a— But I shall not describe it! I'll merely say, I shall consider it an insult to the giver if it has to go for less than fifty pounds!"

This drew screams from the crowd. All the same, the teapot was seriously acknowledged to be a real treasure. Some girls moaned over their inability to secure it. For once, there were no farcical offers to start the bidding. Instead, there was almost a solemn silence.

"A pound!" called out Miss Merrick from over by the doorway. She had just come in.

"Guinea!" Betty said promptly, only to hear higher bids from various parts of the room. In a few seconds the teapot had risen to thirty shillings, and then Miss Merrick had only one rival bidder.

This was Vanessa Durance, a senior, who seemed to be rather losing her head. As other girls could tell, Miss Merrick did not like to drop out, as the teapot was worth several pounds at least, and in any case, she wanted to "go ahead" for the sake of the cause. On the other hand, the Form-mistress was not going to feel happy if she induced a scholar to pay more than the girl could really afford. The trouble about Vanessa was her fondness for showing off. In the Sixth, she was known as "Vanity Van."

"Thirty-five, from Miss Merrick!" Polly joyously announced. "Any advance on—"

"Thirty-six!" drawled Vanessa. "Thirty-eight!" she added, hardly allowing Miss Merrick time to speak.

Now there was great excitement in the thronged gym. Girls were nudging one another in regard to Vanessa's refusal to give in. It was all very well for the hospital fund; but—could she really afford it?

It occurred to Betty that Vanessa might be bidding up like this, intending to "cash" the teapot at a profit at some antique dealer's place in Barncombe. If so—what a shame! Betty herself, when she was bidding, had been doing so for self and chums. Her idea had been that Study 12 should acquire the teapot, and keep it for a present to be made to the captain at the end of term. But that graceful intention could never be carried out now. Study 12, at thirty shillings, had been "whacked"!

"I will say two pounds," Miss Merrick laughingly called out, "and there I think I must stop!"

"Two pounds five!"

"Oh!" gasped the crowd. "Ha, ha, ha!" A few girls started to clap Vanessa for her persistence; but to the majority, somehow, the spirit actuating her was open to doubt.

"This genuine old Queen Anne teapot!" Polly yelled. "From Swanlake, remember! Now, Miss Merrick—"

"Very well, then," the Form-mistress went on again, amidst laughter and clapping. "Two pounds ten! No more, because it is all I can afford, and I would never think of selling it."

"At two pounds ten, and much obliged to you, Miss Merrick!" shouted Polly, thoroughly enjoying the sensation. "Going at two pounds ten; going—"

"Three pounds, there!"

Whew!

For that was Vanessa again!

—Gone!

"PARDON?" said Polly, to give the senior a chance of backing out. "Of course, it's up to me to get the most I can! But, did you say—"

"Three pounds, yes!"

For a moment there was quite a dramatic stillness. Polly was looking over the heads of the girls, to Miss Merrick.

"Sorry," that young lady said, with genuine regret in her voice. "I simply mustn't, much as I would like to!"

Then Polly singled out Vanessa.

"You needn't have jumped to three pounds, Vanessa."

"Well, I did, and I stand by it!"

"Oh, in that case—all right! At three pounds, for the last time! Any advance on three pounds? At three—"

"Guineas!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Bravo, Miss Merrick!"

"Three pounds five!" cried Vanessa, causing another sensational silence.

"Now I am sorry I bid again," Miss Merrick sighed.

"Going at three pounds five! GONE!" Polly shouted, and down came the hammer with a tremendous whack!

"Bravo!" some of the girls cheered, but many others were looking annoyed with Vanessa. It was felt that she had shown rather bad taste. She certainly had put Miss Merrick in an awkward position.

"And now—hi!" came the shrill voice of Naomer from the lower end of the gym. "Bekas, what about refres—"

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes, hooray!"

"Whoa!" Polly requested. "Not yet! I have here a fine work of art by that celebrated artist—Tess Trelawney!"

"Oh!" And the throng became quite willing to let refreshments wait. Whacking away with the hammer, Polly launched into another eulogy, whilst Bill showed the picture round.

"A life-like, full-length study of her Majesty Queen Naomer of Nakara—how much?" Whack! "Eating an apple! Look at that apple in the picture! How much for Naomer, then?"—whack!

"Hi, what ze diggings!" her Royal Highness' own shrill yell was heard again from the lower end of the gym. "Bekas I want him! I will give you—"

But Naomer's starting bid, if it was voiced, failed to reach the rostrum. There was, at this instant, a sudden and appalling bang-crash! at the



lower end of the gym. But there were far more screams of laughter than alarm as it became known that the trestle-table supporting the buffet had completely collapsed!

Naomer, it appeared, had caused this disaster by making too wild a dash to take part in the bidding for her own portrait. On the floor in that corner which had been set apart for the much-talked-about "free issue," there was now—chaos!

Cakes and sandwiches and tartlets lay scattered like tiny islands in a lake of spilt "winter warmer," and hot coffee. There was no longer a choice of liquid refreshment; it had all run together—on the floor.

How the auction crowd shrieked its merriment over this amusing upset! After all that had been heard about free refreshments, there were to be none, after all, unless one chose to do some salvaging.

After a mirthful interlude, the auction was

"Four pounds eighteen and fourpence now, and three pounds five still to come from the Ducrane girl."

"You will be shouting in your sleep to-night, Polly," jested Bunny. "How much—how much?"

But the madcap, like all who had worked so hard for the sake of a deserving cause, enjoyed the most tranquil sleep that night. Something attempted, something done, had earned a night's repose! She was a refreshed and rosy-cheeked Polly who was up first, in her dormitory, next morning, eager to get downstairs to Study 12 before all the usual before-breakfast hurry-scurry could commence.

In her own best copybook hand—large, round writing—she wanted to pen a notice for the green-haize board downstairs, giving the "official" result of the sale.

"Eight pounds three and four," she repeated to herself gaily, as she sped alone to Study 12.



It was soon clear that only two people stood a chance of securing the lovely antique silver teapot—Miss Merrick and Vanessa Ducrane, a senior. When Vanessa, whom most of the juniors suspected of wanting to show off, bid three pounds five, there was a sensational silence.

resumed, and Polly certainly had no reason to suppose that patrons had turned sulky on account of the fiasco connected with the catering department.

The remaining lots went off briskly, and up to the very end the bidding was on generous lines. Then came the settling—a really terrible time for the "clerk"—and a most boisterous claiming of purchases.

Betty turned up in Study 12, presently, with the "takings," correct to a penny according to her record of sales. Only one girl had failed to pay up directly after the sale, as the rules had required.

That girl was Vanessa Ducrane. She had not exactly asked for credit, but had airily informed Betty that payment would be made to-morrow. As the amount in Vanessa's case was a large one, Betty had not felt entitled to protest.

"So there you are, Polly," Betty jubilantly said, passing the money to the official auctioneer.

"That is, if Vanessa Ducrane pays up all right this morning. Anyhow, I am going to include her money in the total—I must, of course."

Sitting down at her side of the study-table, Polly pulled open the drawer to fetch out a writing-pad.

Then it flashed upon her that she should not have been able to open the drawer like this, this morning. It should have been locked.

Back went her chair to let her jump up, in sudden great agitation.

Normally, she left the drawer unlocked. But overnight she had locked it, as she had put the takings in it.

Once again she tugged the drawer open, and then—her mouth formed a mute "Oh!" of wild dismay.

The money—where was it? For it was no longer here.

Someone during the night must have been to

this study, with the key, and now the money was GONE!

"Stolen!" Polly gasped aloud to herself. "Yes, stolen in the night!"

### Vanessa Pays Up!

"GODNESS, Polly! Whatever is the matter?"

She turned to face Betty, who was amazedly at a standstill after entering the study.

"All that hospital money, Betty; it's gone!"

"Wha-at!"

"Stolen in the night—yes! Look; I've just found this drawer of mine unlocked, and there's not a penny left."

Betty returned to the door, and closed it.

"But how terrible, Polly! I mean, it must have been somebody who knew that, for once, there was money in that drawer. No outside thief—no burglar—"

"Oh, no! Besides, if the schoolhouse had been entered, we should have known by now, although it's so early. I wonder—about that key—"

And Polly, breaking off, put her hand into her frock pocket.

"No, it's not there now, Betty. So it was taken during the night. The thief must have done everything whilst we were all asleep."

"Somebody in the school—must have been," Betty gravely realised. "And that's a nice thing! Whether a girl or a member of the staff—oh, but we are not going to imagine that it could have been one of the servants, Polly!"

"There has never, never yet been a case of dishonesty amongst the staff," Polly answered. "We know that for a fact."

Another pause. To have to infer that it must have been a Morcove girl only distressed both girls all the more.

"Whatever shall we do?" Betty whispered. "It can't be hushed up. It's too big a loss for us to make it up amongst ourselves in this study, and say nothing. Besides, that wouldn't be right, if we could."

"Hospital money!" Polly suddenly flared out. "That's what makes it so disgusting—for a girl to have robbed a charity. We girls are not the losers. It's all those kiddies at the hospital—children of poor parents—ugh, dash!" she stamped. "When you think!"

"Yes! The girl who did it must be an out-and-out rotter," Betty sighed. "We don't know; she may have been hard-pressed, tempted. Even so— But what, Polly? What have you found there?"

Polly, in sudden great excitement, had pounced as if to pick up some tiny object from the study floor. After straightening up again, she looked at something lying on the palm of her hand. She must have been too excited for speech, and Betty stepped close to see what her chum had found.

"Oh!" Betty gasped.

Polly had picked up a white bone button of a kind that both girls had instantly to associate with the blue-print frock worn by Morcove housemaids in the morning.

"This tells us something!" she emitted at last. "Here, wait a bit, Betty. I want to run downstairs."

She was absent perhaps five minutes, during which interval of waiting Betty was joined by several of her other chums. In a low, grave tone Betty told them about the missing money and what Polly had discovered that looked so like a clue to the thief's identity.

As they all knew, no routine duty should have brought any of the maids to this study between the overnight assembly and this present early hour of the following morning.

Suddenly Polly was back. She whirled in upon them all and slammed the door shut behind her violently.

"I know who did it!"

"Polly!"

"That new maid—Effie Barnard! Oh, it's no use your all looking like that," Polly rushed on. "I'm positive. I've just been speaking to her. There is a button, exactly matching this one, missing from her print dress."

Betty and the others were as if stunned into silence. Similar thoughts were rushing into the minds of all. The honesty of the Morcove staff had been tested, proved a thousand times over during term after term. But—Effie Barnard was a new recruit to the staff.

"She did it—I know she did!" Polly broke out again in her explosive way. "I'm not jumping to any unkind conclusions. That girl, I tell you, is the thief! She must have crept into our dorm in the night, to get the key from my pocket. Then, first thing this morning—before we were up—only a few minutes since, in fact—she came to this study and took the money."

"How awful!" sighed Madge and others.

"Tewwible!"

"And this is hospital money she has stolen! She has robbed a charity! If it were some half-crown or other of ours—well! But she has taken nearly five pounds belonging to the hospital fund! Remember—"

A pause for breath, and Polly spoke on again as fiercely as ever.

"Remember, girls, she knew I was going to take that money in the drawer for the night! I mentioned it in front of her yesterday, just before the sale—"

"I remember," Helen said sadly; "when the small key of the drawer dropped out of your pocket and you picked it up."

"Yes! Effie Barnard was the only servant in the school who did know that the money would be here during the night! All that, on top of my finding the button—"

"Did you show her the button?"

"Yes, Betty, I did! But I didn't let her have it. I let her understand, instead!"

"What did she say, then?"

"At first she said nothing—only changed colour. Then she said something about having come to this study, just now, to return something taken to the kitchen by mistake, when it belonged here. Something that was used for the buffet, yesterday, in the gym."

"But that," Pam eagerly submitted, "is plausible enough."

"Oh, plausible!" Polly stamped. "That's just what Effie Barnard is—plausible! But how can I help being so furious! I can't get over her having robbed the hospital fund! Not to mention that it is—"

"St!"

But Betty, even as she hissed checkingly, was bound to realise that Polly's angry voice had fatally carried beyond the four walls of the study.

The suddenly opened door revealed Miss Merri-ck, and her look told the chums—she had heard!

"What," she anxiously inquired, glancing from one to another of the girls, "what is this that is being said about Effie Barnard. As I neared the door I distinctly heard you saying something about Effie Barnard and the money being stolen! So—I must know!"

Tragic then was the silence in the study. Given a little time for reflection, time for all their abounding good nature to get to work, the chums might have decided to hush-up the theft after all. At any rate, it would not have been like them to consider desperate measures. Perhaps they would have seen their way to making good the missing money in secret, although they were all in a "spent-up" condition, after the sale.

But, for good or ill, the terrible affair had become known to the Form-mistress. There could be no shielding Effie Barnard now. And the dreadful disgrace that it was to mean for her; the likelihood of its proving a lasting stigma—all this was making them feel most gloomy.

Polly herself was now looking as if she would like to bite her tongue out.

"Polly," said Miss Merrick in a very distressed tone, "come along with me at once!"

Polly frowned, but knew she could not refuse the request.

"Say nothing to other girls at present, about all this," the Form-mistress counselled Betty and the rest, on the point of going away with Polly. "I am sure I can trust you to do that."

"Yes, Miss Merrick." Then Form-mistress and madcap were gone, leaving the study, for all it was so thronged, in a hushed state.

Everywhere else in the Form quarters these troubled girls could hear the usual happy hubbub marking the commencement of another day of school life.

Carefree girls were going in and out of other studies; doors were banging, voices were making a pleasant babel, little bursts of laughter came. But here, in Study 12—

"We mustn't even let our looks tell the rest of the Form," Betty said tensely. "At any moment, someone may burst in."

Even as the words were spoken, a striding step brought someone to the closed door, and the knob turned. The girls had a half-second in which to banish, if they could, all signs of the upset from their looks. Then they saw that it was Vanessa Ducrane who was entering.

The senior was, as usual, bearing herself in a patronising way towards the juniors. Too good to start with a cordial, "Morning, girls!" as any of the nicer seniors would have done, she inquired brusquely:

"Where's Polly, then?"

"Oh, she—she's about somewhere."

"You'll do, anyway, Betty; I can't stay for Polly," Vanessa airily remarked. "Here's the money for the teapot."

And she put down the three pounds five in silver and two ten-shilling notes.

"Right," Betty nodded, leaving the money where Vanessa had so haughtily dumped it. "Polly will have it."



Polly could not conceal her scorn and anger at the sisters' revelation that they had tendered the bad half-crown for a purchase at the auction. Little did she realise what a dramatic consequence their mean action was to have.

The juniors, worried about Effie, were uncomfortably silent, and possibly Vanessa read something in their looks after all. She glanced from one to another and then did not seem able to go away without saying something more.

"Anything wrong?" she asked sharply.

"Er—nothing we wish to talk about," Betty answered.

Then Vanessa laughed disdainfully.

"Well, there's the money," she exclaimed, chin in air, "and so that ends it—doesn't it?"

"Of course it does," Betty cried rather testily.

"Why?"

"Oh—I only wondered, perhaps, if Pam, there, regrets giving the teapot to the sale."

"Regret it—why should I?" Pam submitted serenely.

"Anyhow," said Vanessa, "I paid enough for it!"

And she stalked out, closing the door behind her with a slam.

#### Serious for Effie!

POLLY'S chums did not see her again until she joined them at the Form's breakfast-table.

She came in with Miss Merrick, having been kept talking, presumably, until the gong went. It was no time to ask how matters now stood, but as soon as the whole school was up from the tables, with morning school to think about, Study 12 was resorted to for a "confab."

There was a great weight upon Polly's spirits now. Betty and the rest could tell that they were going to have a trying time with her during the day. Like most girls who are made for meritment, she was a bad hand at enduring sorrow. And there was a sorrow to be endured now. She, as much as any of the girls who knew, was greatly upset over the downfall of Effie.

"Miss Merrick is taking the matter up with Miss Somerfield—which means," Polly gloomily muttered, "the girl will be told to pack and leave straight away. And now I feel that it is all through me!"

"Polly, you mustn't look at it in that light," Betty quickly pleaded. "Surely Miss Merrick made it clear that it is the girl's own fault, however much one may want to pity her?"

"Yes, I know, but— Oh, bother!" was Polly's irritable outburst. "I suppose it would have been wrong to—an injustice to the rest of the staff—to hush it up. Miss Merrick said something about that; but—"

"Yes, well," Pam put in, "there is that to be borne in mind. There might have been a second theft, and suspicion falling upon somebody quite innocent."

"Cheer up, Polly," Bunny said, looking doleful enough herself. "We're all sorry about it, but what can we do?"

"Nothing, I suppose," Polly admitted, and after a heavy pause: "I still feel she deserves all that I said about her. It was such a wicked theft! But she's young, and it means that her character is gone, and— Oh, I don't want to talk about it any more!"

"Vanessa has paid what she owed," Betty remarked, to change the subject. "It's in the drawer, Polly."

A frowning nod was the only immediate response. Polly was walking about the study.

"In the drawer?" she returned at last, fetching her mind back to what Betty had said. "All right. I'll see to it presently. Miss Merrick has said I had better bank it with her, and she's welcome to it, too. We don't want another upset, thank you."

"Wather not, bai Jove," sighed Paula. "It gwiaves me, geals."

"What about me?" squeaked Naomer pathetically. "Bekas, I feel I am to blame—"

"What, you? How?" Polly snorted.

"Bekas, it was all through ze free refreshment stunt that Effie got mixed up with us! Eef I had never—"

"Oh, shut up!"

"Don't be short with the kid, Polly—" Madge began; but the madcap flung out of the room, as if she knew herself to be in a hopeless mood.

Five minutes later, such a set-out began in the corridor, it fetched girls from their various studies in alarm. They found Polly going for one of the ever-odious Denver sisters.

Fay, the elder, had thought to have the laugh over Polly, not knowing that the latter was in such an irritable mood. Edna Denver was having a try to save Fay from getting her head smacked as quite a crowd rushed up.

Then Polly stamped off. There would have been general surprise at her excessive display of temper, but it became known that Fay had said a very exasperating thing.

Fay, on her own shameless admission, had tendered a bad half-crown for a lot purchased at the auction. She and Edna considered it a great scream that they had been able to work off the "dud" coin, receiving in exchange an article worth a shilling at least.

It was some boasting about this to Polly herself that had caused her, in her touchy state, to see red. As for the Form in general, scorn for the mean trick practised was freely expressed; but did the Denver girls care? Not they!

On the ground that the auction had been more or less a comedy affair, they refused to admit that they had had no right to work off the bad half-crown.

"It isn't a bit the same as if we had tried to pass it at a shop!" Fay insolently claimed.

"Besides, what did we get in exchange for it?" sneered Edna. "Only a rubbishy 'bargain'—not worth tuppence to its owner!"

"You took the coin, Betty; you should have had your eyes open!" was Fay's parting shot, as she walked off with her sister. "Ha, ha, ha!"

Betty did not trouble to reply to such a mean remark. She got Pam and others to go downstairs with her, to find Polly. They found her, drifting about out of doors. Discreetly avoiding any reference to the bad half-crown, Betty quietly reminded her moody chum that it was almost time for school. They had better go back to the study and collect their books.

"I'm not going in until the bell rings," Polly said grimly. "One of you bring my books down for me, will you? Look here, girls, don't stay around me!"

"Polly, don't take it to heart so, just because the accusation against Effie has come through something said by you," Betty entreated. "It couldn't be helped."

"But—"

And there Polly broke off, whilst they saw her face lose all its colour. Polly pointed, then they all saw—Effie Barnard, walking away from the schoolhouse, down to the staff gateway.

Sacked!

They could tell; the four-mile walk was before her, to that humble home in Barncombe—a home which she had disgraced, even as she had disgraced herself! Doubtless the headmistress had offered to get her conveyed home, along with her belongings; but the girl was striding away with a passionate step—making it evident that she considered herself badly treated.

"Oh, is she—going already!" Polly said limply.

"You stay here," Betty quickly counselled.

"Much better. And let me go."

At first it seemed as if Polly would abide by this advice. But Betty had only run half the short distance to overtake the sacked girl, when she found her chum coming up after her.

"No use, Betty! I've got to say something."

"Well, don't have any scene, dear."

Betty was deducing a good deal from the refusal of Effie Barnard to stop and wait for them. The girl knew that they were wanting to speak to her, and yet she still walked at a fierce pace.

Finally, the two girls ran together and caught up with Effie at the staff gateway. She flashed round upon them then.

"I hope you're not going to say anything, because I would rather you didn't," she said faintly. "They'll still believe in me at home, even if you and the mistresses can't. That's all."

And she turned her back upon both girls and hurried on again.

The bell was ringing all Morcove into class; but it was not that summoning clangour which deterred Betty and Polly from making another attempt to speak with the sacked girl. What did deter them was the anguishing fact that she had resorted just then to the words of an injured innocent.

When her guilt had been so clearly established,



it must be costing her a desperate effort to appear aggrieved. The strain upon her would only be intensified by anything said. She had been crying.

Only after the two girls had seen her pass out did they turn to walk in silence back to the school-house. Their chums had all run to get indoors and get books from the study. Tragically silent were Betty and Polly as they stepped together across grass and gravel.

### Was She Guilty?

**A**FTER the midday dismiss, Polly came into Study 12 ready to tear up a letter which she had received by the second delivery. Betty and others were already there.

"It's from Jack," she imparted, dully, letting the scraps of paper snow down into the waste-paper basket. "He talks of coming over to Morcove with Dave and the others on Saturday."

"Good!" Betty nodded cheerfully. She and the rest were eager to snatch at anything that would serve to dispel the madcap's miserable mood. "That's something, Polly—"

"Yes, wather, bai Jove! Do cheer up, Polly dear—"

"Bekas—"

"Oh, if you all begin again, I shall go away!" Polly scowled. "Where's that money for Miss Merrick?"

Taking it from the drawer, moody Polly sat down to sort the silver from the coppers and then check the total by counting it all again.

"It's a topping morning," she commented, flicking coins apart; "I wonder you don't all get out to games!"

"Zen what about yourself, Polly? Bekas—"

"Will you shut up, kid, or I shall— Hallo!" the irritable one broke off, picking up a coin.

Then she threw it down, hard, to the table. It fell with a leaden dullness.

"Here!" she cried, starting up from her chair. "This half-crown's—bad!"

"What, another?" cried Judy amazedly. "I say!"

"Or is it—is it the same one?" Polly panted, her excited eyes seeking Betty's. "Surely you know what I mean by that, don't you? 'This coin—'"

"Now, Polly, keep calm," Betty implored. "Don't let's have any shouting, to be heard outside the study. It's all very strange—"

"Strange!" Polly ejaculated. "It's frightful! All this money came from Vanessa Ducrane, this morning. Not last night, but THIS MORNING—after the theft—"

"Yes, but—sh!" several of the others guardedly entreated. "Polly dear—"

"Oh, you take things so calmly; I can't!" Polly cried wildly. "How can I, when I was the one who got Effie Barnard sacked, only a few hours ago, and now—now her innocence is proved! Proved! And the thief was—"

"Polly, it isn't proved yet, so be quiet," Betty again cut in. "Of course, it's obvious to us now. In the money that was stolen last night there was a bad half-crown. Whoever took the cash, took that bad coin with the rest. And this morning Vanessa Ducrane has paid us money that includes—a bad half-crown."

"Well, then?"

"This," Betty gravely answered. "Nothing will be easier than for Vanessa to deny all knowledge of a bad coin. If she had one, it was because there must be a lot of bad money going

about. And remember, bad coins do turn up in a district a lot at a time."

"Betty's right, Polly," said Pam quietly, "and if you are thinking of rushing to accuse Vanessa, then it will be a big mistake."

"And meantime?" Polly questioned unhappily. "Effie is simply to go on suffering, is she? Suffering for a thing that—"

"But, Polly, listen—"

"Oh, I can't, I won't!" Polly protested, in her distraught state of mind. "Stay here and talk, and talk! But I—'m going out!"

She swept all the money back into the drawer, and next moment was gone from the study. The others, after some rapid discussion, went to find her. Downstairs, they saw that her outdoor things were gone from the peg. Then they discovered that even in such a brief space there had been time for her to get her bicycle and ride away.

To Barncombe, of course! To the home of Effie Barnard!

Guessing as much, Betty and several others set off as quickly as possible. They rode their fastest, yet it was not until they were actually in the narrow High Street of the quaint old town that they came upon Polly. She was even then turning aside into Tanners Lane.

By the time they were with her, she had stalled her bicycle against a lamp-post and was giving a knock at the door of No. Eight. She looked round upon them miserably, her eyes saying: "Why did you come?"

From inside the humble dwelling with its white doorstep came the "grisling" cry of a four-year-old boy. Then it stopped suddenly, as if somebody had taken up the wee kiddie to soothe and pet him.

The street-door opened. A girl of nineteen, recognising the callers as Morcove scholars, drew herself up. She was dark-haired, sharp-featured—unlike Effie; but they guessed that this was Kate Barnard.

"What do you want?"

"May we see your sister?"

"Why should you want to see her? Any rate, she doesn't want to see you, when it's some girl or other at your school who has got my sister the sack!"

"I'm that girl," Polly began candidly. "I admit—"

"Then more shame for you! Perhaps you'll know what it is, some day, to have to earn your own living, and then get your character taken away by someone cruel enough to make up a lot of lies—"

"Stop," Betty interposed. "That's not fair to Polly Linton. She had every reason for fearing that your sister must have taken the money—"

"Listen," Polly broke out again, a-shake with the fresh upset; "what my friend is wanting to say—what I want to explain is—"

"Oh, dare say! Your looks told me that, when I opened the door to you! You're sort of sorry now. But it's no good your coming here just to say you're sorry, when all the harm's done! Effie, you go back to the kitchen now!"

For Effie was suddenly beside her fiery sister, in the doorway, with little Johnny hugged in her arms.

"I tell you," Kate rounded upon her sister, "you get back!"

"But these girls—if they have turned up, Kate,

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supremely confident of recapturing her, and had taken every precaution to see that her prisoner could not possibly escape!

"Hungry?" the woman jerked out.

"Very," said Marion.

"All right. I'll get you some bread-and-jam and a glass of milk."

"I suppose you wouldn't like me to come down and cook myself an egg?" Marion asked banteringly.

Her reward was an intended blow, changed at the last minute—doubtless by the resolute clenching of Marion's hands—into a glare of hatred.

Slam! went the door as Mrs. Blake strode out. Click! echoed the key in the lock.

Marion was grateful for the food her step-mother thrust around the door some time later, but long after she had finished it she sat and pondered, head between her hands.

Not one way of escape!

And she'd got to escape. She'd made up her mind on that point. She wasn't going to remain here, absolutely helpless, fuming with impotent despair and suspense, while Mrs. Blake tried to discover other clues to the mystery in order to destroy them.

That's what the woman would do, naturally, if she was afraid of Marion finding them. Marion was perfectly aware of that.

Rising to her feet, she began to pace the room in the bright sunlight. All at once she stopped. A floorboard was loose.

She dropped to her knees, pulled back the thin, faded carpet and examined the board, pushing it with her hand.

Yes. It moved downwards, and sprang back into place when the pressure was taken away.

Thoughtfully, Marion studied it.

Immediately below this part of the floor was the hall cupboard, the roof of which she had always suspected of being separated from the floor by a very thin layer of plaster.

Supposing she removed one or two boards?

Might it not be possible to scrape away the plaster and also remove sufficient of the cupboard roof to enable her to drop through?

A thrill of excitement running through her veins, Marion ran to her dressing-chest and picked up a shoe-horn. With this she prised at the side of the loose board until she was able to get her fingers underneath. Then, dropping the shoe-horn, she seized the board with both hands and heaved upwards—

Crack!

From somewhere behind her that sound rang out with startling unexpectedness through the room.

With a gasp, Marion whirled round. At first she saw nothing unusual. Nobody was at the barred window. There was no animal in the room—a cat, for instance—as she had half-expected. Nothing had fallen off the mantel-piece, and the inartistic pictures were still in position.

"Perhaps the furniture creaked," Marion murmured, and was turning her attention to the board again when she saw it—the most astounding, breath-robbing thing she could possibly have imagined.

Part of the papered wall opposite the door was slowly swinging outwards, revealing a dark cavity beyond, through which came a breath of cool, musty air!

"My goodness!" Marion ejaculated, frozen into her crouching attitude on the floor, with the board still gripped in both hands. "It's a—it's a secret door!"

**WHAT** an astounding discovery Marion had made. To what does the secret door lead? Will it aid Marion to learn still more of the amazing mystery which has come into her life? Be sure to read the enthralling chapters of this great home-life and mystery story which appear in next Tuesday's **SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN**.

## "Sacked Through A Schoolgirl"

(Continued from page 517.)

because they can't be happy unless I say as how I forgive them—"

"Forgive them! Yes, I know; that's like you!" seethed the elder girl. "And you're not going to, so there! You're the same as mother, with all her talk of bearing and forbearing—pah!"

Then Effie, with a glance which implored them to go away, turned to go along the narrow passage to the dingy kitchen. The last they saw of her, she was drooping her own head over the little curly one of her infant brother, as he still cried in her arms.

"Please," Polly addressed the elder sister desperately, "can we come in for a minute? I want to explain—"

"So as to give yourself a bit of peace of mind—yes, I know, and I'm not the one to let you have it, so there!" Kate flared out again. "There's no forgiveness about me—none! I'm not soft, if Effie is! What I will do is to pay you out for it, so you'd best look out!"

"But," Betty pleaded, "listen—"

"I won't! And you can go, all of you! Go on,

take yourselves off! As for you, Polly Linton—since that's your name—you mind what I said! If ever I get the chance—I will!"

SLAM!

Loud enough to be heard all down the main street, the door had been banged shut in their faces.

"Now you simply must come away with us, Polly," said Betty. "Some other time, dear! It's not a bit of good, with the sister in such a state as that."

"If only she had been ready to listen," Madge Minden sighed. "The way she threatened you, Polly—it made me shudder."

"Oh, I don't wonder at her," Polly muttered, as she slowly turned away with her chums, to do the cycling back. "As for her threat—that's nothing."

"Nothing," she had said; and yet how soon was havoc to be caused in her own life, because the threat had been fulfilled!

[END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.]

**DON'T** miss "HER PLOT AGAINST POLLY," by Marjorie Stanton, next Tuesday's grand long Morcove story.