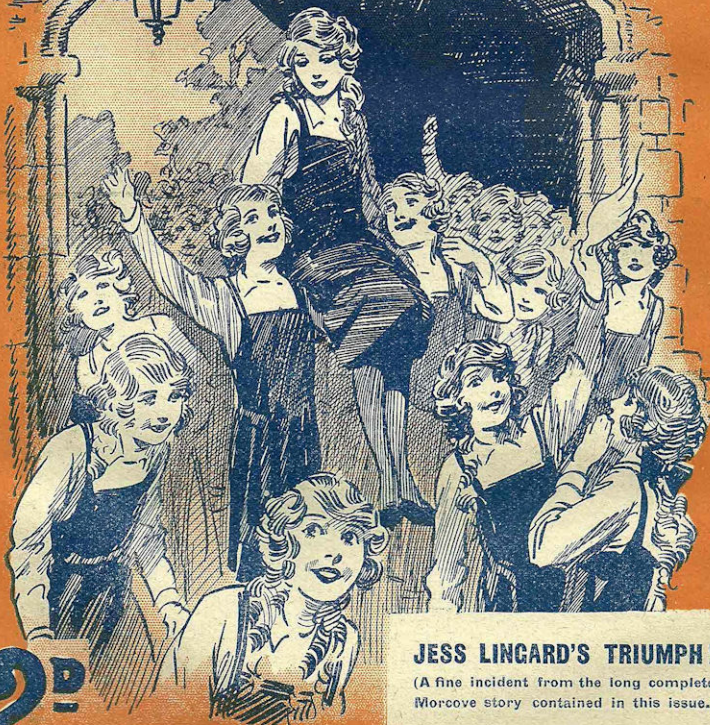


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A SPLENDID STORY OF THE
GIRLS OF MORCOVE SCHOOL.

The Schoolgirls' Own



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JESS LINGARD'S TRIUMPH!

(A fine incident from the long complete
Morcove story contained in this issue.)

A Splendid Long Complete Tale of the Girls of Morcove School.



THE 'FRIEND' SHE FOUND OUT!

An absorbing story of Betty Barton and Co., telling how Stella Munro found out her "friend," Audrey Blain, and how Jess Lingard was set right in the eyes of her schoolfellows.

By Marjorie Stanton.

When the Postman Came!

"WHERE is the jolly old postboy this morning, girls?"

"Yes, where is he?"

"With that letter I am waiting for from home."

"Same here!"

"And here!"

It was half-past eight. In another half-hour the scholars of Morcove School would have to troop into morning classes. And were they to do that without having seen what the first delivery of letters might have for them?

The girls hoped not. Comments on the unusual lateness of the postman were being voiced freely, for it was a matter that concerned all.

"Keeping me in this awful suspense on the very morning when I ought to hear from my people with a nice, hefty remittance!" madeap Polly Linton said with a mock groan, as she stood with Betty Barton and other chums of the Fourth Form in the main porch of the school.

"Too bad!"

"Yes, wather! Bai Jove, geals," simpered Paula Creel, with that amiability which endeared her to all, "this is twuly distwessing! I wather gather that most of us are in a bankrupt condition."

"As we always are towards the end of term," rejoined Betty Barton lightly.

"And—and we can't—" Polly began, in a tone that suggested sudden bitterness; but she thought better of her exclamation, and bit back the words.

"Well, dear?" questioned Tess Trelawney.

"After all, I don't see why I shouldn't say it," Polly went on, in her headstrong way. "A good few of us are spent up, and I was just thinking—we can't borrow money—that doesn't belong to us, like—"

"Sh, Polly dear!" Betty entreated, at the same time giving an involuntary glance to a certain girl who was going by. It was Jess Lingard.

Now that Polly's attention was directed to this girl by a nudge, she seemed to be glad that Betty had restrained the bitter exclamations. All the same, Polly could not help watching Jess Lingard with a look of pent-up disgust.

"I suppose I am too free with my tongue,"

Polly owned ruefully. "At the same time, girls, if there is one thing I detest, it is—"

"Look! Here comes the postboy!" came the sudden joyful interruption from several girls at once, and in an instant Polly was restored to her usual boisterous spirits.

"Hurrah! Hi, hurry up, slowcoach!" she sang out, framing her lips with her hands. "Waiting!"

There was a general laugh as the worthy old postman was seen to plug along a trifle faster on his bicycle, his big boots thrusting away at the pedals in paddle-wheel fashion.

The girls surged out into the open air to meet him, and Polly for one breezily took charge of his bicycle after he had dismounted.

As a rule, the Morcove "postboy"—he was at least sixty years of age—took a bit of time to prop his cycle against a tree-stem before coming the last few yards to the porch at a very slow gait. This morning, however, Polly grabbed the "jigger," slammed it against the tree in a jiffy, and was then free to join the crowd that was mobbing round the custodian of His Majesty's Royal Mail.

A mistress was at the school entrance, ready to relieve him of the heavy satchel of letters, and next moment the distribution was going on at lightning speed.

Letters were either passed into hands that were flashing out to receive them, or were sent gaily skimming over the heads of other girls, to be caught by raised hands at the back of the crowd.

"Madge Minden!" called the mistress, who was hastily dispensing the shoal of correspondence, "Paula Creel—two for Paula! Naomer Nakara! Where are you, Naomer dear?"

"'Elo, present!" shrieked Morcove's dusky little maiden from the desert lands of North Africa, whilst she stretched a brown hand above her head. "Ooo, I have a letter all the way from Nakara! Hoorree!"

"Jess Lingard!"

"Here, Miss Redgrave!" And the girl who had been the object of Polly Linton's disgusted exclamations a few moments since received her letter and slashed it open eagerly, whilst she walked away from the noisy throng.

It was from her mother, in hospital in London, and if only Jess Lingard had had that one

anxiety upon her mind to-day—*anxiety to know how darling mother was faring—then this letter would have left her happy enough.*

For the news was all good. The poor widow had written a longer letter than ever this time to the devoted daughter who was a scholar at far-famed Morcove. Mrs. Lingard told how quickly now she was progressing towards a complete recovery, and how soon her discharge from the hospital might be expected. Full of heartfelt gratitude was the letter for the frequent loving messages that Jess had penned from the school, whilst the mother-heart had poured out a torrent of love for her darling Jess at the end of the cheery four pages.

Yes, everything was all right in that direction. So Jess was saying to herself as she kissed the letter passionately. But ah, what a load of trouble still burdened her—trouble that mother must never know anything about!

She was standing in a sort of dream, close by the foot of the stairs, when two girls hurried by, having just received their share of the morning's mail. One was Audrey Blain. She glanced at Jess but did not speak; nor did Audrey appear to want her companion, Stella Munro, to take any notice of the girl.

"Come up to the study, Stella darling," Audrey exclaimed, starting to ascend the stairs quickly; and Stella had obediently followed half-way up the first flight before some conflicting impulse seized her. She paused then, looked round at Jess, then came slowly down to her.

"You—you have heard from your mother, Jess?"

"Yes. She is going along splendidly, thank you, Stella."

"That's all right, then. I—I am so glad, Jess," Stella exclaimed, but in a tone which suggested that she also had something on her mind that more good news about Mrs. Lingard could not dispel.

"Well, I—I shall see you later," she faltered awkwardly, and then went off after Audrey Blain, with such a shamefaced air as would certainly have puzzled any stranger who had witnessed it.

Audrey in Funds!

REACHING the Fourth Form quarters, Stella entered Study 8, where Audrey Blain was wearing a very satisfied smile as she finished reading her letter.

"I am all right," Audrey announced gaily. "What luck have you had, Stella darling?"

That girl had yet to open her letter. She now did so with agitated haste, her face clouding over as she unfolded the missive from home and found no enclosure in the form of a money-order.

"Oh, dear!" she sighed drearily. "I'm sorry, Audrey, but—but father doesn't appear to have sent the money."

"Um!" grinned Audrey. "Well, my people have cashed up handsomely, as they always do. I asked for a five—a tenner if they liked to make it one. And look at these!"

She rustled the two five-pound notes that it was her joy to have received from her too-indulgent parents, but Stella hardly gave heed to the banknotes. In a glum way she was skimming through her letter.

"Oh, I see why it is!" she exclaimed suddenly, in a tone of great relief. "This is only a scribbled note from father to tell me that mother is motoring down into this part of the country, and will

be coming to see me at the school. So I shall get the money soon, Audrey."

She added, nervously folding up the letter:

"You see, Audrey, I—perhaps I didn't hint strongly enough that I needed a big remittance badly. I was so—"

"You were afraid—yes," laughed Audrey. "Well, I was not, and so it is all right, anyhow. I've got the money—"

"Ten pounds!" Stella said, in an awed tone, now realising the magnitude of Audrey's remittance. "More than enough to—to repay Jess. Oh, Audrey, how glad I am! You—you won't mind paying her the eight pounds, and letting me settle for my share after I've got some money from mother?"

"My dear Stella—"

"I shall not keep you waiting long for my four pounds."

"Ha, ha, ha! What a goose you are to think that I am afraid of your doing me in the end!" Audrey laughed. "No, Stella. I've got more than enough, as you say, to settle with your precious poor relation, and so—"

"You'll let her have the money at once, will you?" Stella exclaimed eagerly. "The eight pounds that she lent us to get us out of that wretched scrape last Satur—"

"Stella, just a moment!" Audrey suddenly struck in, putting the two banknotes away. "Do you really think we need repay Jess in such a hurry?"

The cool question left Stella with a white face.

"Not repay her as soon as possible?" she gasped out in horror. "Oh, Audrey, when she—she ought never to have lent us the money! It was not hers to lend."

"That is just the point," Audrey answered, as coolly as ever. "Jess was only holding the eight pounds in trust for other girls. We know the circumstances; it was a bit of money over which there had been an amusing dispute. She—"

"She took the trust so seriously, Audrey. And oh, haven't you seen how Betty and the rest have been, cold to her ever since they suddenly asked her for the money and she could not hand it over."

Audrey merely shrugged, and the flippant action seemed to horrify Stella. She spoke on entreatingly:

"Audrey! Let us do the best we can over the whole wretched business. Even when we have repaid the money the other girls will never know why Jess was without it for a certain time. That is going to be bad enough for her; don't—don't let us make it harder for her than we need!"

"You are not seeing things as I see them," Audrey answered, putting a little wisp of her honey-coloured hair to rights. At that moment she looked just what she was—a beautiful, vain, selfish girl, without a scrap of sincerity in her.

"As I see it," she went on coolly, "by repaying Jess to-day the girls will be more or less satisfied, for she can then repay them. In any case, the matter will be washed out—forgiven and forgotten."

"Yes, Well, that is what we want."

"Is it? Is it what we want? Frankly, Stella," the heartless girl pursued, still smiling her cynical smile, "do we want Jess to get out of this fix? Do we want her at Morcove School—in this study, always under our noses? I don't! And I am sure you don't, either, if you would only have the pluck to say so."

Stella sank into a chair, pressing her cold hands together.

"You know, Audrey," she owned huskily, "I would have preferred Jess to be at some other school. As a poor relation of mine, she— Oh, she has got on my nerves!"

"Of course! It is a sickening business having her here, and I'm for getting her cleared out at the end of this term."

"Audrey—"

"The girl is only here on charity. Let Miss Somerfield get wind of that breach of trust—and the affair is bound to get round in the school in the end, too many know about it for it to be kept dark."

"But, Audrey—"

"Wait a moment! I want to point out, Stella, the moment Miss Somerfield hears about that affair, she will say that Jess had better not come back next term. And there you are!"

Stella was standing up again, all of a tremble.

"You are ignoring the fact, Audrey, that Jess broke her trust to get us out of a terrible scrape. We set that farmer's rick of hay alight. We only appeased him by paying him the money that Jess came to our rescue with. We owe it to Jess—"

"We owe it to ourselves, Stella darling, to get that girl out of the way. She is a nuisance, a misery; not our sort—a mere council school kid! And now is our chance to get shot of her!"

"No! Oh, I can't—I can't be a party to any such thing!" Stella said hoarsely. "It would be too heartless!"

"Indeed! You are a fine one to talk like that," Audrey said lightly, causing Stella to gaze at her in a sudden frightened manner.

"What—what do you mean, Audrey? What do you know about—"

"Oh, nothing! Gracious, don't look like that! One would think you had something on your conscience about Jess that has been a secret even from me! I was only suggesting that all along you have been none too nice to Jess, have you?"

"I have not, and I—oh, I am sorry! I am miserable about it all," Stella sighed, sinking down again. "That is why I do so want her to be repaid that money."

"Well, I propose not to repay her," Audrey finished calmly.

The bell was ringing for classes, and she crossed to the door with her mincing step; but Stella sprang up again, and plucked her by the sleeve.

"Audrey, you must give that money to Jess after morning school. You must! If not, I shall speak out—I will! I am in the mood to own up to—to everything! Oh, I can't go on like this—I can't!"

"Exciting yourself about nothing," was Audrey's comment on Stella's hysterical state. "All right! Eight pounds is nothing to me. To please you I'll settle up, and won't you be sorry some day that we didn't take the chance when we had it, and get Jess Lingard cleared right out of our lives?"

She shook her dainty sleeve free of the other girl's plucking fingers and passed from the room, and after a minute Stella followed.

At the last moment before going into classes Stella found Jess and whispered a word to that girl in a relieved tone.

"That money, Jess—it will be repaid at mid-day! Audrey has promised."

Audrey had promised. But how Audrey would carry out that promise remained to be seen!

How the Promise was Kept!

"LOOK out, Betty!"

"Why, what—"

Betty Barton got no farther than that with her question before she was silenced by a roguish wink from Polly, as that young madcap came into Study 12.

"Hush! Pray silence for her majesty, the queen of the Form!" Polly whispered, with another wink. "She is coming—"

"Coming here—Audrey is?" exclaimed Betty. "At that rate, wonders will never cease!"

Paula Creel and two or three other girls were in the study, and they all smiled faintly, anticipating being treated to a dose of Audrey Blain's most lofty airs.

Thus there really was quite an impressive silence as that girl, appearing at the open door—



THE MORNING MAIL! Letters were either that were flashing out to receive them, or sent skimming over the heads of other girls to those at the back of the crowd.

way, glanced disdainfully at the batch of chums, whilst she kept her head held high.

"May I have the great privilege of being granted a moment with the esteemed captain?" she asked, in her ironical way. "Oh, don't go, you other girls! It is not as private as all that!"

The other girls stayed, but they made a point of entering into side talk over by the window, whilst Betty Barton waited for what was to come next from this inveterate enemy of hers.

"Er—Betty," Audrey began, in an off-hand way, "I understand that there has been some trouble between you girls and Jess Lingard about a matter of eight pounds?"

"Well, and if there has?" Betty inquired. "Only this," was the bland response. "Both

Stella and I are deeply grieved that the money was not forthcoming from Jess when she was asked for it. I had a big remittance this morning from home, and so perhaps you will please take the eight pounds out of that."

And she tossed down two five-pound notes upon the study table.

Betty stared at them, then turned to the other girls with a "Look here!" expression.

There was a murmured "Bai Jove!" from Paula Creel, whilst Madge, Tess, Polly, and Trixie scarcely looked pleased at the sight of the money.

"Eight pounds," Audrey remarked, irritated by Betty's reluctance to take up the money. "Haven't you the change amongst you? If you haven't, it really doesn't matter. Later on will do!"

"Wait, though—yes, I have change," Betty broke out, as Audrey was turning back to the door. "I am a little taken aback, Audrey, that's all."

"Oh, why? If I choose to discharge Jess Lingard's liability to you girls, doesn't that end the matter?" Audrey asked.

"Not quite," was the grave reply. "It doesn't explain how Jess came to—to default over the money. Another thing—"

"Pooh!" Audrey interrupted, shrugging. "If you girls were silly enough to entrust Jess with the eight pounds, why—"

"I was saying, there is another thing," Betty broke in doggedly. "I don't understand why you should bring the money to me—to us girls in this study, for we are all concerned in the matter—"

"Yes, wather!"

"Instead of giving it to Jess to give to us," Betty wound up bluntly.

"Why, don't you see," Audrey said, not in the least put out of countenance, "if Jess had suddenly come to you with the eight pounds, you might have wondered—well, if it was really hers to pay over to you. You have got it direct from me, to end the matter, and now I really must be going. Ta-ta!"

And she was gone, mincing away in spite of a cry from Polly:

"Stop, Audrey!"

She was gone, without having waited for the change to be given to her, and now for a few moments Betty and Co. stood staring at the two banknotes on the table.

Every one of the girls was frowning.

"I'll take the two pounds change along to Audrey in a minute," Betty broke out at last. "Meantime, I'd like to see Jess about this."

"Yes, let's have her in; I'll find her!" Polly exclaimed, and dashed away from the room to go chasing off in search of the girl who for days had been under a very black cloud.

Only by asking other girls did Polly get on the track of Jess, for she had drifted out of doors, to spend one more hour of bitter loneliness sauntering about the grounds. Polly found her at last, pacing to and fro in one of the shrubberies, and five minutes later they entered Study 12 together.

"Oh, Jess," Betty began at once, "Audrey Blain has been here to hand us eight pounds. That is the amount that you—"

"Yes, I know," Jess struck in, looking deathly pale as she nodded. Her whole mien was that of a girl who is anxious to evade being questioned.

"Of course," Betty went on, "you may think

that now the money has been made right with us, there is an end to it. Audrey appears to think so."

"I don't," Jess answered quickly. "You must still wonder why I had not got it when I was asked for it."

"Well, yes, we do," Betty admitted sadly. "We were bound to be—surprised."

"I know," Jess nodded again. "I don't blame any of you."

"The question is," burst out Polly, "can you tell us now how it was that you defaulted over the money?"

"Good gracious, Jess!" chimed in Paula, from the depths of an armchair. "Pway don't be afraid to own up, if you did do wong in bow-wowing the money, thinking to pay it back before it was wanted! We geals realise you may have been hard pweessed, don't you know. We realise you are not a wich geal, by any means!"

"Only we were so sure you could be trusted," Polly burst out again. "Well? Oh, Jess, do explain!"

"I am sorry, but—"

"Pah!"

That was Polly again, as she lost patience once more. With a stamp of the foot she turned her back upon Jess, and walked to the other end of the room.

"She has caught Stella Munro's complaint of saying 'I am sorry!'" Polly fumed. "It is no use arguing. It only makes me miserable to see her standing there, with nothing to say for herself!"

"Then may I go?" poor misjudged Jess pleaded sadly. "There is nothing I can say, except that—"

"I am sorry!" Polly put in, with a mirthless laugh. "Oh, it is a sickening business!"

Jess, in the doorway, looked at Betty, who could only say with her eyes: "You had better go, then—and I, too, am sorry!" And so the unhappy girl turned about and walked off, knowing only too well how fatally her helpless silence was telling against her.

Such good friends of hers had those same girls been up to last Saturday. But since then—No, she could not blame them for having turned against her. No girl could have stood in such a guilty light and yet have retained others' faith in her.

And what a last drop was this that had been added to the whole cup of bitterness—Audrey's making good the money in a fashion like that!

It gave Audrey the credit of having come forward with the money, simply because, the defaulter being Stella's relation, the breach of trust had been painful to Stella.

Again poor Jess felt she wanted to be alone in her misery, and she was drifting down through the house when Stella came by on the way to the studies.

"Hallo, Jess!" Stella said, quite brightly, as if she was sure it was all right now. "Audrey has kept her promise, hasn't she?"

"She has made good the money—yes," was all Jess would answer. She drifted on, and Stella went her way, too, feeling that the girl need hardly have looked still as glum as that.

But Stella was to understand better before another minute was out. She had not been with Audrey more than a few seconds in Study 8 when the door opened and Betty came in.

"Your change out of the ten pounds, Audrey,"

Betty said, and putting down the money went out quickly.

"Much obliged, I am sure!" Audrey called mockingly.

She was picking up the two pounds, after the door had closed, when she realised that Stella was staring in renewed horror.

"Well, dear?"

"I—I don't understand, Audrey! Did you take the eight pounds to Betty yourself?"

"Certainly!"

"Oh, Audrey! Oh, how could you?" came the miserable cry from Stella. "I had no idea—I never dreamed you would keep your promise that way about making good the money."

"What on earth difference does it make, goose?"

"All the difference in the world," was the agitated answer. "It gives you credit for having helped Jess out of the disgrace she was in. If you had paid her, and left her to pay them—"

"Rubbish!"

"No, it is awful what you have done!" insisted Stella wildly. "If Jess herself could have taken the money to the girls, they might have guessed that really she had lent it to—someone—someone who had since repaid her. The disgrace would have passed off. But now—"

"Oh, give it a rest! Hang Jess!" Audrey suddenly flared out passionately. "Let the girls think what they like about her, I don't care!"

"No, you don't; but I—I am beginning to feel—"

"You are beginning to get fed-up with your Audrey's shocking ways, that's about it!" laughed Audrey. "Stella darling, will you please oblige by being the Stella I am so fond of—not a Stella who worries about nothing?"

"Nothing!" the guilty-minded girl echoed heavily. "Oh, Audrey, if you only knew. I feel that I cannot let that affair of the eight pounds rest here. It is too—too hard on Jess!"

"Nonsense, darling! cheer up, and come down and eat some dinner. I hear the bell going. School this afternoon, worse luck!" grimaced the reckless one. "But we have a long summer's evening in store, and—Hallo, telegrams!"

She made that startled remark as a maid suddenly entered, displaying a buff-coloured envelope.

"Miss Munro!"

"Yes, that's me!" Stella jerked out, and quite snatched at the missive. It took less than the sight of the telegram to agitate Stella these days.

The maid withdrew, and Audrey was putting in the odd moments of waiting by practising a two-step round the room, when there came a great cry from her friend.

"Oh, how dreadful! Audrey, my mother—Look! Read it!"

The flimsy sheet passed from hand to hand, and in a flash Audrey was looking really distressed for once, as she read these words:

"Handed in at Exeter, 11.30. To Miss Stella Munro, Morcove School.

"Your mother injured in motor smash and taken to cottage hospital. Come at once."

A Taste of What Jess Has Suffered!

STELLA had collapsed into a chair after reading the terrible tidings. She now sprang up and snatched back the telegram from Audrey.

"I must get away to Exeter at once!" she panted hoarsely. "I must see Miss Somerfield and get permission. Oh, Audrey, isn't it shocking? My mother—nearly killed, perhaps!"

"It is—very sad," Audrey said. "Anything I can do, dear—"

It was no use saying more. Stella was gone—was already rushing away to see the headmistress of the school without a moment's waste of time. Nor was Audrey herself at a standstill for more than a few seconds after she had been left alone in the study.

For in those few brief seconds an idea had flashed upon her—one of those daring, selfish plans that her mind was ever quick to hit upon.

Downstairs she hurried, but instead of joining other girls who were now trooping into the dining-hall, she went across to the local timetable that was hung in a glass frame upon a lobby wall and studied it.

Then she looked pleased.

There was no train to Exeter until past two o'clock, and then only the usual slow one.

Audrey stepped away, traversing a ground-floor passage that brought her to the headmistress' sanctum. Stella was in there receiving Miss Somerfield's deep sympathy over the news that had come by telegram, and it was clear that the girl was going to be got away to Exeter with all possible speed.

"My dear, of course you must not waste a moment," the kindly headmistress was exclaiming. "I am only wondering about the trains; and then, too, you have not had your dinner! Well, Audrey, what is it?"

"Excuse my interrupting you," that girl said in her demurest tone, advancing into the room.

"If there is no fast train—"

"There is no train at all until past two o'clock."

"Then may I help Stella in her trouble, and drive her to Exeter in the sidecar?" Audrey pursued, looking ever so sorry for her friend.

"Oh, Miss Somerfield, don't say no! If only we could get away at once, Stella and I, we would be there by two o'clock!"

"But, my dear Audrey—"

"I will drive so carefully, Miss Somerfield!"

"That I take for granted," was the quick response. "You certainly never have had to be censured for doing risky things with that motorcycle and sidecar of yours. Very well—yes, if Stella thinks she would like to have your help."

"Oh, thank you! Yes, I would like to go at once—at once!" Stella burst out, visibly trembling with the upset that the telegram had given her. "My poor mother may have been nearly killed!"

"Just as Jess Lingard's widowed mother nearly was in London, a few weeks ago," was Miss Somerfield's sad rejoinder. "How strange, indeed, that that accident should have been followed by this one!"

And Stella could have echoed those words in all earnestness. Strange, indeed!

Before Miss Somerfield spoke—in the first few moments after the opening of the telegram—she had realised something of what Jess had suffered when that girl found herself in precisely the same plight.

How vividly Stella's mind had gone back to that fateful day when she was in the shop in Barncombe with her poor relation, and the policeman had come in to say that Jess' mother had been run over in London! That was the day—ah, that was the same fateful day when



STELLA'S APPEAL! "Audrey, you must give that money to Jess after morning school! If not, I shall speak out!"

Stella, in her weak moment, had committed the great wrong against Jess, the secret wrong about which even Audrey knew nothing!

Strange that it was Stella's turn now to have alarming news of one so dear to her as her mother! To the girl herself it seemed as if fate had brought all this to pass, so that she should experience to the full all that poor Jess had suffered. And experience that same anguish and anxiety Stella did.

She and Audrey were soon off and away in the motor-cycle and sidecar, and whilst Audrey drove the machine along with all the usual skill and nerve, there in the sidecar was huddled a girl frantic with anxiety as to what awaited her at the journey's end.

Audrey had nothing to say as she sent the speedy outfit racing along the undulating Devonshire highways; but if she had been talkative, she would have got not a word in response from Stella.

That girl's mind seemed numbed by the suspense she was suffering.

What would be the news of mother when she got to her journey's end? Oh, was it a very terrible accident, a case of the victim being maimed for life—lying there in the hospital-ward on the point of death, perhaps!

Torturing suspense—and it was only what Jess had suffered that day she had to fly off to London! How much more one would have pitied the girl at the time had one known what it was like to suffer like this! But Stella remembered—no, she had not been very concerned at the time. It was the very time, too, when she had not scrupled to do the deed that meant dooming Jess and the widowed mother alike to lifelong poverty.

Mile after mile the motor-cycle and sidecar hummed along, at such a pace that the hedgerow on either side of the white highway was a blur of green. How magnificently Audrey was driving, sitting astride the saddle, with a dustcoat drawn over her indoor clothes and her daintily shod feet stretched out to the rest! Whenever Stella, holding her hat steady in the rushing wind, took a look at Audrey's face, she saw how the girl was smiling, as if at some pleasant train of thought she was following. But that could hardly be the case, Stella decided. The smile must be one inspired by Audrey's laudable desire to keep on like this—faster, faster, if possible, and yet get through calmly to the end without a single mishap! Nobody, driving as Audrey was driving now, could have a thought for anything but the driving.

So Stella concluded, little knowing how coolly Audrey was detaching her mind from the actual task of manipulating the outfit so as to ponder the fun that could be got by and by.

"I'll drop her at the cottage hospital, then go off on my own," Audrey was thinking gaily. "Exeter is a jolly city, and I can get quite a spree before driving back to hateful Morcove."

They were getting very close to the famous city that is one of the glories of the West Country, when they had to climb a very steep hill on bottom gear. The motor-cycle and sidecar crawled steadily onwards and upwards, and so Audrey was able to relax her attention.

"Don't worry, Stella," she counselled her passenger then; "I don't suppose your mother is seriously injured."

"Oh, I do hope not!" came half-tearfully from Stella. "But such awful accidents do happen!"

"If your mother is in a bad way, Stella, you will stop the night in Exeter?"

"Yes; you heard Miss Somerfield say that I might."

"And I shall stop, too, to keep you company," Audrey rejoined sweetly. "Miss Somerfield didn't say anything about that, but she won't be angry. I love Exeter!"

Stella made no response to that. The light remark had shocked her. She suddenly wondered—was Audrey enjoying this because it offered the chance of some outing? Oh, surely not! No girl could be so shallow. And yet that smiling remark did seem to suggest a looking forward to a few snatched pleasures.

Now they gained the top of the steep hill, and they could speed on again, glimpsing the city and its stately cathedral amidst the beautiful Devonshire countryside. Stella's feverish eagerness to reach the journey's end revealed itself in the way she sat bolt upright in the sidecar, gazing towards the town as if she was trying to pick out the very building to which her injured mother had been taken.

Once inside the city they had little difficulty in threading their way to the hospital, and Stella was out of the sidecar in the very instant that her friend pulled up at the gates.

"I'll wait here, dear," Audrey purred. "Slip out and let me know how things are!"

In five minutes Stella came running back, looking overjoyed. She had not yet been into the ward, but her anxieties had been immensely relieved. Her mother's injuries were far from serious, although she was likely to be kept in hospital for a week.

"It might have been an awful smash," Stella panted, "but mother's chauffeur kept his nerve.

It happened just outside Exeter, when she was on her way to Morcove. Oh, Audrey, aren't you thankful to know that it is nothing terrible, after all?"

"Thankful? I feel I want to celebrate!" was Audrey's smiling response. "I say, shall you be staying long? They won't want you hanging about, will they?"

"They must let me stay the rest of the afternoon, at least!" Stella exclaimed earnestly. "Oh, I can't go back until—"

"No, but can't you seize the chance to—well, have a bit of fun?" Audrey laughed. "See the sights, and so on!"

"Audrey!" the other exclaimed, in a shocked tone. "How can you?"

"Sorry! Didn't know I was proposing anything very dreadful," was the light reply. "Only wanted to cheer you up. Do I wait here all the afternoon, Stella, or would it be very dreadful if I just got myself a cup of tea?"

"I'm sorry, Audrey," Stella gulped out then. "You have done a fine thing in getting me here so quickly, and I am grateful to you. You have earned the right to spend the afternoon just as you please."

"As I certainly mean to do!" was Audrey's unspoken thought.

She rode the outfit into the hospital grounds and left it in a convenient spot just off the carriage-way. Then, discarding her dustcoat, she minced away, looking smart enough to please any other eye, but not smart enough to please herself. Half an hour later she was getting a tidy-up in a teashop, where she afterwards sat down to a nice pot of tea and a cream bun.

From the swagger teashop Audrey went on to the cinema, and for two hours she sat in one of the best seats, thoroughly enjoying both the films on the screen and the box of chocolates in her lap.

It was five o'clock when she came away from the picture-house, and she was pretty sure that by this time Stella had been asked by the hospital people to leave the building, the case she was visiting not being a critical one. So Audrey pranced through the streets in the expectation of finding Stella waiting for her close to the hospital gates.

Stella was there, right enough, looking pale and depressed.

"You want some tea," Audrey suggested. "Everything is all right, isn't it?"

"About my mother? Oh, yes!" Stella answered. "There is nothing to worry about now. She is not badly hurt—is treating the whole thing as a joke. But I can't help thinking how I did worry coming along!"

"That's ridiculous of you!" Audrey exclaimed. "Never look back on troubles that are past. I don't! Stella, you want a nice swagger tea—"

"I have had a cup, and—"

"Have a proper tea with me, and then we'll find another cinema. I've been to one, and it was lovely!"

"No!"

The refusal was voiced in a tone that Audrey had never heard Stella use before. Absolute determination was in that "No!", and Audrey stared.

"What is the matter with you, Stella, that you speak like that?"

"I will tell you," came the steady answer, "when we get back to Morcove!"

"Do you wish to return at once, Stella?"

"I do—at once!"

"Well, I don't," said Audrey, just as bluntly. "And, what is more, I simply won't do so! You know where the station is; you had better catch a train."

"Audrey—"

"As for me," that reckless girl went on, "I shall ring up Morcove School and tell them that I am hung up for small repairs, but shall be in before dark. Do you see, Stella?"

It would have taken Stella Munro a long time to explain all that she was seeing now—not only in regard to Audrey, but in regard to her own unhappy self.

She did not voice another word, but walked away, and twenty minutes later she was taking train back to Morcove!

Repentance Comes Too Late!

THAT slow train out of Exeter up to the coast, with its lengthy stops at each station—how its persistent crawl worried the schoolgirl who sat all alone in a first-class compartment, booked for Morcove Road!

If she had felt like crying "Faster—faster!" to Audrey when they were driving to Exeter, she felt no less impelled to cry "Faster!" now. For her anxiety to get back to Morcove was every bit as great as her anxiety to get to the hospital had been.

Why?

The answer to that question was clear enough in Stella's mind.

To-day something had happened to change all the girl's weak, miserable, half-hearted longings into firm resolution. To-day she had had a taste of what Jess Lingard had suffered at that other time. She had found out, too, what an utterly worldly creature Audrey was.

Until to-day, whenever Audrey had been quick



AUDREY REPAYS THE MONEY! "Please take the eight pounds out of that!" Audrey threw down the two five-pound notes.

to point out the chances for some outing—some picture-palace—it had seemed to Stella only part of the girl's brilliant, reckless nature. But Audrey's conduct this afternoon had been despicable! That was the only word for it—despicable!

Beyond all doubt Audrey would never have offered to drive to Exeter if she had not seen the desperate journey in the light of a joy ride. Anxiety or sympathy in regard to Mrs. Munro had not entered into the matter at all, so far as Audrey was concerned.

Stella, whilst the train crawled along, recalled again how Audrey had only waited a moment at the hospital to learn how things were, and had then dashed off to enjoy herself. The sight of her mincing back at five o'clock, it had absolutely revolted Stella in her then state of mind.

But this was not all—it was far from being all. There had been Audrey's suggestion that they should hang out the time in the city, and so get back late with all sorts of plausible excuses.

Time was when Stella would have given in to the temptation, but now—

No! No more of Audrey and her winning ways now that she was so clearly revealed as an utterly heartless creature!

"She never has any pangs of remorse; but I have!" Stella was saying to herself fiercely. "I have had them to-day worse than ever, and I am not going on like this—not another day! Oh, I want a different life from the one I have led so far! I want different friends! Give me Jess—Betty Barton and all the rest! I must get right with them, and with my conscience, too!"

Nor had any of the old fatal irresolution seized her by the time she was out of the train and hurrying along the quiet road to the school. Her mind was made up; her purpose was unflinching.

Directly she entered the school she would seek out the girls and make a clean breast of it over that business of the eight pounds! That would be making some restitution towards Jess. And then—that other business! That terrible wrong done against Jess and her mother weeks ago—that, too, should be put right!

It meant writing to father in London and telling him everything. Well, she would do it! The letter must be written to-night and posted by to-morrow morning at the latest. She was resolved to do it.

Almost breathless with rapid walking, Stella at last cut across one field so as to save going right round by the road to the school gates. She entered the school grounds by scrambling through a gap in the hedge, and at once saw the sports field teeming with life.

Everybody was out of doors this evening, it seemed. Cricket, tennis, croquet, net-ball—all such games and pastimes were going on. Stella picked out the girls with whom she was eager to speak. They were over at the tennis courts, and she felt inclined to go straight across to them and start blurting out a full confession in regard to that affair of the eight pounds. And Jess—no, Jess was not with Betty and Co. Was it likely, when she was still in such disfavour? All their faith in her utterly destroyed!

Poor Jess! Oh, what a life of cruel injustice, hers had been!

Stella suddenly paused on a path skirting the sports field and looked around for Jess. She gave keen glances to the remotest parts of the school grounds, knowing how Jess, in her shunned state, had got into the habit of keeping away from other girls. Where was she now, that one might

run to her and lift all the burden of sorrow from her shoulders by saying what one meant to do to clear her?

She was not to be seen anywhere, and Stella was going on again when she suddenly realised that Betty and Co. had abandoned their game of tennis, and were racing across to her.

Nothing in this surprised her. It was like them to be anxious to know how her mother was. The splendid girls! Although she had never done anything to deserve their liking, they meant to show their sympathy. They were not like Audrey, who little cared what happened to anybody so long as she herself got a jolly time!

Still retaining their tennis rackets, Betty and a few others came racing up, and in a moment Stella was being asked the question she had anticipated. What was the news about her mother?

She told them gladly; the accident had not been a serious one, and her mother would soon be all right again.

"Good!" exclaimed several of the girls in chorus. "So you have no worry in that direction, Stella?"

"Oh, none—none!"

"Then, Stella," said Betty, after the others had looked at her as if giving the signal for her to speak on their behalf, "we want to have something out with you."

"Yes, wather! Bai Jove—"

"We know who set fire to Farmer Garley's rick," Betty Barton went on gravely. "We know why Jess Lingard had to part with that money she had been entrusted with! She did it to save you and Audrey!"

"And you and Audrey have never done a thing to set her right in our eyes!" Polly burst in gustily.

Stella fell back a step, feeling stunned. The affair had been found out—found out before there had been time for her to confess!

"Oh, but listen to me!" she faltered imploringly. "I—I was going to—to confess! I tell you—"

"It is no use telling us that now," Betty broke in grimly. "It is too late, Stella. What can we think of a confession that is only made after the guilt has been brought home to you? I imagine my chums will say the same."

"Too late—yes."

"Yes, wather!"

"Too late!"

Again the girls were speaking as with one voice, and Stella, as she stood before them all, with a dreadful sinking of the heart, and saw the righteous anger in their eyes—Stella knew that those were the truest words she had ever heard spoken.

It was indeed too late!

Making It Up to Jess!

THERE was a prolonged pause before Betty resumed in the same stern tone:

"You may as well be told how you and Audrey have been found out. We knew about that burnt rick last Saturday, and it was to help a poor working farmer over his big loss that we then asked Jess for the eight pounds. We decided that that was the best thing to do with it. To-day, when we got the money at last—"

"We all cycled over to Mr. Garley's farm," chimed in Polly, feeling she must take her share in the talk, as usual, "and offered him the eight pounds—"

"With our best regards. Yes, wather," murmured Paula.

"And then he told us," said Betty. "You see, he was too good a man to take advantage of our ignorance and pocket the eight pounds, when he had already been paid that amount by you and Audrey."

"And when Audrey comes back," cried Polly disgustedly, "I shall say to her just what I want to say to you, Stella! You ought to be ashamed of yourself! The pair of you have served Jess disgracefully!"

"Bai Jove, and to think that you are a relation of Jess!" said Paula. "Weally, I cannot weftain f'rom using a swrong word! Stella, I wegard you as a—downwight f'raud!"

Stella was silent. What was there for her to say? If only—oh, if only her genuine repentance and the desire to set Jess right had come a few hours sooner! But now it was too late.

Useless for her to protest, be it ever so vehemently, that she had been going to make things right by confessing. They would never believe her.

How often in the past had she said "I am sorry!" and the words had meant no real regret, as these girls had known full well?

And so, as she saw Betty and all of them turning their backs on her in utter contempt, she could voice no cry that stood a chance of being believed.

"So much for Stella Munro!" Betty exclaimed tensely, as she and her chums were going back to the tennis. "Where is Jess, though, all this time? I shall not know a moment's real peace of mind until I have apologised to her."

"What about me, then?" Polly said glumly. "I ought to be spanked! I was the worst about it all. Oh—oh, how I did let fly at Jess over that affair of the eight pounds! And now—"

"Gears, bai Jove—look! Theah is Jess; Naomer has found her!" was the sudden jubilant cry from Paula. "Hooway—hooway! Naomer said she would twy to find the geal."

"Then come on!" Polly almost yelled, and streaked across the field with Betty and the rest hard upon her heels.

At the same time, that dusky little rascal, Naomer, was seen to be bringing Jess along like a prisoner taken into custody. Very likely Naomer had been unable to explain to the girl why she was urgently wanted, and that accounted for Jess' inclination to hang back, whilst Naomer dragged her forward, crying excitedly:

"Ello, present! Hooree—yes, I find her! You say to me, 'Find Jess, and we shall be happy!' Well, I find her!"

"Jess—oh, Jess darling!" panted all the girls, dashing up to Naomer and her "captive."

"Where have you been that we couldn't find you, or make you hear when we called? We have been longing to—"

"I went for a stroll alone—"

"Ooo, yes, and I find her all alone in the dell, crying," Naomer informed the girls excitedly. "But no one is going to cry now, is they? You all love Jess, and you love me, and I love all of you, so how happy we all are!"

"Haw, haw, haw! How dwell you are, Naomer!" Paula chuckled; and instantly regretted the little outburst, because it was the signal for Naomer to dash at her and hug her.

"You are glad I find Jess for you—yes?"

"Yes, wather, bai Jove! Howevah—Naomer, pway westwain your feelings of welief! Your embwaces, Naomer— Healp—stop it!

Dwop it, will you? Na—o—mer, you twying cweature!"

In vain the aristocrat of the Fourth Form wailed her protests. Naomer was in that glee-tu state, she had got to expend her spirits somehow, and so poor Paula did not get a chance to take part in the other girls' talk with Jess. By the time Paula had escaped from the huggings of Naomer, Betty and the rest had practically finished their abject apologies to Jess for the way they had all misjudged her.

"Bai Jove!" Paula breathed, when at last Naomer turned her attention to Polly. "Now pewhaps I may make a few wemarks! Jess darling— Oh, why do you cwy now, Jess?"

"I don't know, I'm sure, except that I'm so happy!" was Jess' sobbing answer. "You have said such kind things, all of you."

"Kind things! We have not said half enough, I think!" cried Polly boisterously. "Me, I ought to go down on my knees to you, Jess darling! I was so free with my tongue—"

"Yes, wather! I mean—"

"You needn't talk, Paula!" was Polly's mock-scornful cry. "You were as bad, and if you don't jolly well help me to carry Jess shoulder high, this very instant—"

"Eh, what? Cawwy Jess—"

"Shoulder high—yes!" Polly repeated, appealing to all her chums. "Betty, Madge, Tess—everyone of you! Aren't we going to let the whole school see that Jess is the girl for us?"

"Yes, wather! Bai Jove, I agree! Up with her, geals!"

But Paula was nowhere in it when the scrimmage took place for the honour of hoisting Jess shoulder high. One moment amongst the boisterous pack of schoolgirls was enough for the aristocrat of the Form. Then she wriggled out, with hair all over her eyes, and had hardly got her breath back by the time the cheering started.

That was when Polly and Betty, the winners in the struggle, had Jess hoisted high in the air, and were carrying her in that triumphant fashion towards the schoolhouse.

In vain Jess laughingly appealed to them to put her down. Before the eyes of everybody on the field she was carried along, with half the Fourth Form by this time making a procession of cheering girls.

"Hurrah—hurrah! Jess is the girl for us!"

"Yes, wather! Bai Jove— Oh, Naomer darling— Oh—ow!"

"He, he, he! Hooree, keep a smile!" was that little rascal's mirthful cry, as she tried to get Paula to give her a pickaback. "Ello, present!"

"Dwop it, you dweadful person! Get off me!" howled Paula, with hair all over her eyes again.

But Naomer, little imp, hung on still, and so the procession went forward with as much laughter as cheering, as all joyful processions should.

The Fourth Form at Morcove School was its old hearty self again!

Hisses for Audrey!

THE twilight had set in before Stella Munro, alone in Study 8, heard such sounds as told her that Audrey Blain was back from Exeter at last.

Stella heard then some angry talk break out amongst a number of girls who were in the study corridor, and just once or twice she detected Audrey's sneering tones. From this it was clear that Audrey, after reporting back at the school

and getting excused for being late, had encountered Betty and Co. on her way up to her study.

They, of course, were tackling her over that affair of the burnt rick, and Audrey was giving them all some of her insolence. She did not care if she was found out. What had it to do with them?

There must have been some scornful cry of that sort from the girl, for all at once Stella, in the study, heard some of the girls hissing her one-time adored friend.

Then the door flashed open, and Audrey stalked into the study. She was very pale, but was laughing. She kicked the door shut behind her, and then gazed at Stella.

"Ha, ha, ha! So the whole business has come out, Stella! How rich! Have they been hooting you, too?"

"No; but it would not have surprised me if they had," was Stella's husky answer. "Those girls—they must think me an absolute disgrace to the school."

"And what if they do?" returned Audrey, tossing her hat and gloves aside. "It isn't as if you wanted them for your friends!"

Stella's heavy silence made Audrey suddenly give her a closer look.

"Well?"

"I did want them for my friends," Stella answered huskily. "I came back from Exeter wanting to—to be done with you, and on the right terms with Jess—with Betty and Polly and all of them."

Audrey said:

"Stella, what on earth do you mean?"

"Just this," was the quick response. "I may be a bad girl, Audrey, but that is not to say that I want to have a bad friend any longer."

"Oh, indeed?"

"The way you acted over that repayment of the eight pounds this morning made me see you in a light I never thought you would appear in," Stella went on. "But there is more—much more. You didn't really care a rap whether my mother was badly injured or not. Going to Exeter was a mere chance for a joy ride. Audrey, there was a moment this afternoon when I—I hated you!"

"Oh, really?" Audrey returned, refusing to look annoyed. "How extremely dramatic! Slow music, please, and now let Jess come on in the limelight! That sweet child! How affecting it will be to see you throw your arms about her neck!"

"Jess has not been near me; she is as disgusted as any of the others," Stella exclaimed miserably. "What wonder, either? But that, Audrey, is not going to make me alter my resolve."

"The resolve to be a good little girl in the future, eh?"

"The resolve to make an absolute atonement to Jess," the other girl flashed, with a gleam in her eyes that Audrey had never seen there before. "I have had a lot upon my conscience for days and days, and now—"

"Oh, all right—all right!" Audrey shrugged. "Do as you please; it doesn't matter to me."

But it did, and Audrey, as she stepped to a mirror and made pretence of being so unconcerned, was inwardly raging.

One ugly fact confronted her. Stella—even Stella—was going over to the enemy! A bitter pill for Audrey! For weeks now this Stella had been the only friend whom Audrey was able to boast, and now even she was done with her!

It was at this moment that Audrey, hearing

the study door open softly, turned about, to see Naomer standing there.

"Well?" snapped out the self-styled queen of the Form. "What do you want?"

For answer, Naomer made a face at Audrey. Then she said:

"Boo! You are a horrid girl!"

Audrey glared. She quite understood what this meant. Taking example from the other girls' hostile demonstration in the passage just now, Naomer had felt she would not be a true member of the Fourth Form coterie unless she indulged in a little demonstration of her own.

"No one loves you," Naomer said, in her quaint way. "You are pretty, but you have no heart! Boo!"

Then Audrey simply flew at Naomer, and, seizing her, shook her violently.

"Steady!" Stella sought to interpose; but the infuriated girl hissed savagely:

"You hold your tongue! I'll teach this young monkey to cheek me! Betty has put her up to this! Well—"

"No Betty has not—" Naomer began to protest, but was silenced by being shaken again.

"There has been a bit too much cheek from everybody," Audrey hissed on, "and so now to make an example of somebody! Take that, you young monkey—and that!"

She beat Naomer about the head—slap, slap!—then shook her again.

"And if you give me any more of your sauce, you—"

"I say you are horrid! I say you are bad!" Naomer gasped out, her spirit roused by the violent handling she was receiving. "You let me go at once, or I shall bite you!"

Audrey's laugh was perfectly awful to hear, Stella thought. Again that girl—Stella—tried to interpose, and this time Audrey sent her spinning with a thrust of one hand, whilst the other still gripped Naomer by the shoulder.

"Bite me, will you? Do you know what I mean to do? That—and that—and that!" Audrey panted furiously, again striking the girl who was so much smaller than herself. "And now, down on your knees and say you are sorry!"

"No! I say you are horrid! I—"

"Audrey, stop it! Oh, don't hurt the girl when you know she is such a simpleton, a—"

"You hold your row, Stella! Once again, Naomer, down on your knees! I am in the mood to thrash you!"

Still Naomer refused to grovel, although she looked terrified by the expression in Audrey's tense face and glittering eyes.

"Down on your knees, you young monkey!"

"No, I not do what you say! I refuse!"

Then Audrey fairly dashed the frail girl to the floor, and was going to beat her as she lay all asprawl and helpless, when the door flashed open once more, and there were shouts of:

"Stop! Oh, you bully! Stop beating that girl!"

Audrey straightened up, pale and breathless.

There in the doorway were Betty and her chums, and she seemed to forget Naomer altogether as she gazed passionately at the captain of the Form.

Without a Single Friend!

BETTY came right into the room with a quick stride to help Naomer stand upon her feet.

It was but a moment that the Form captain was giving her hand to the victim of

Audrey's vicious mood, but in that brief instant it was possible to feel how the poor girl was trembling.

"Go to your friends, Naomer dear," Betty said very quietly, passing her on to Polly and others who were crowding in the doorway. "No need to tell us how you have been treated."

"She sauced me," Audrey burst out fiercely, "and so I gave her a lesson to remember. I'll give you some of the same thing if you don't clear out!"

"You had better be careful," Betty warned her inveterate enemy coldly. "For two pins this should be reported to the headmistress. We girls have all given you a long rope, Audrey Blain, but there is a limit!"

Audrey snapped her fingers in front of Betty's nose.

"That's all I care for you—see!" she hissed, quite beside herself with rage. "Report away! I am just about fed-up with Morcove School—"

biting a lip. And how vividly those prophetic words were to be recalled before another week was out!

Betty had voiced them simply because she felt that things could not go on much longer like this. Little she dreamed, at the time, how fast the hour was indeed coming when Audrey Blain would know Morcove School no more!

Loath to bandy further words with the shameless girl, the chums all turned to pass from the study, taking Naomer with them. Stella remained in a stricken attitude until they were almost gone from the room, and then suddenly she flung forward, with hands stretched out beseechingly, whilst she gave a piteous cry:

"Betty—all of you, wait! You don't understand! Oh, I did my best to stop Audrey—I did, indeed!"

"What does Naomer say about that?" Betty asked. "Naomer—"

"I will tell you true!" Naomer cried excitedly.



AUDREY'S CRUELTY! Audrey fairly dashed the frail girl to the floor. The door flashed open, and there were shouts of "Stop!"

"I can assure you, Audrey, the school is just about fed-up with you."

Betty looked round at Naomer, who was quietly weeping now with her head against Polly's heart. Poor little Naomer, she was such a bundle of sensibilities, the treatment she had received had left her all unstrung.

Then Betty turned upon Stella.

"And you, Stella—you stood by whilst that poor girl was being so cruelly beaten! Shame—shame on you, I say!"

"I—I wanted Audrey to—to stop—"

"A fine lot of use that was—wanting Audrey to stop! You stood by; you cannot deny it! But then, of course, we all know that you and Audrey are just a pair!"

"And may I add," put in Paula Creel, with the real dignity that she could assume at times, "a precious pair, too! The day that Morcove School is wid of Audrey, for one, will be a great day for us girls!"

"It hasn't come yet," sneered Audrey.

"It is coming fast, at this rate," Betty said,

"When I am being beaten by Audrey, Stella say: 'Don't hurt the girl!'"

"A fine best that was, to be sure!" Polly exclaimed scornfully. "No, Stella, if you were a different girl from the one you are, you would have gone for Audrey. And that's all there is to it!"

A murmur from the others told how they were in perfect agreement with Polly's bitter opinion, and next instant the study door closed, and Audrey and Stella were alone.

A twitching smile was starting to show itself at Audrey's lips, when she saw Stella crash down into a chair and hide her face in her hands.

"Oh, what chance do I stand?" came in a despairing tone from the wretched girl. "I am so mixed up with you now, I can never make a fresh start with anybody! Those girls—Jess, too—what chance do I stand?"

And then a great shob shook her, as this thought came to her, perhaps: As poor a chance as she and Audrey had given Jess over that affair of the money!

"Well, stop snivelling; you get on my nerves!"

Audrey broke out at last, whisking about the room. "You see what you have done for yourself. Thrown me over, and got not a single other friend in return! You duffer!"

There was no response from Stella, except another burst of sobbing as she rocked in the chair with her head between her hands.

The light was waning fast now. In a few minutes there would be the clangour of the school bell, summoning all the scholars to call-over and prayers. Audrey clicked on the electric light, then resumed her restless pacing to and fro. As for Stella, it was only the fact that call-over was at hand that made her pull herself together. She gulped back her last sobs, dried her tearful eyes, and stood up; but even then she had nothing to say to the other girl.

Thus they were still alone together, with a dramatic silence between them, when Jess Lincard came into the room.

Ignoring both girls, Jess set about getting some of her things together. A few seconds sufficed for the task; then she stepped back to the door, laden with most of her belongings.

"I will fetch the rest away in the morning," she said. "I have been offered a share in some other study, and I am going there."

"I am heartbroken to hear it," Audrey commented, smiling cynically. "The loss of your charming society will leave me desolate—quite! And Stella—Stella was just getting to love her poor relation, weren't you, Stella darling?"

Jess spoke from the doorway, addressing Stella:

"I must get over one or two things, Stella, before I have anything to do with you again, even if you want to have anything to do with me—and I can hardly believe you do."

"Jess, I am sorry," Stella pleaded desperately, "about that business of the burnt rick! Oh, let me explain—"

"It is not that affair I feel so—so disgusted about," Jess struck in hotly. "It is the fact that you could stand by and see Audrey bully poor little Naomer. I think you might have done more for Naomer, Stella—even though Audrey is your one great friend."

Jess was gone as soon as those words were spoken, and so she did not see how Stella winced.

"Your one great friend!" Audrey echoed, closing the door after the heavy-laden Jess had departed. "Young Workhouse meant to be very cutting, no doubt! But wasn't that last remark rather a timely reminder that you really have had a friend in me?"

"A fatal friend!" Stella answered tensely. "Oh, it was an evil hour when I chummed with you! I have been like putty in your hands. I was bad enough, and you made me worse!"

Now the bell downstairs could be heard ringing, and Stella, eager to end the talk, crossed to the door. But she had to turn back, remembering a certain letter than she had written before Audrey came in.

In an agitated manner the remorseful girl stepped to her side of the table and felt under the blotting-pad for the letter, because that was where she had placed it temporarily, after it was sealed up.

"You see this?" she suddenly exclaimed at Audrey, flourishing the missive. "It is to my father in London."

"I fail to see how that concerns me," Audrey returned.

"You will see, when I tell you what is in the letter," Stella rushed on. "Audrey, this is my confession about something that even you have

never known about. It tells my father that weeks ago, in the Lingards' shop at Barncombe, I found a certain document which proved they were entitled to all the money we Munros came into last year from South America."

Audrey was staring, with jaws agape. "I destroyed that document," Stella spoke on hoarsely. "By doing so, I cheated Jess and her mother out of thousands of pounds! Well, this letter"—and she waved it again—"it is going to set all that right. My father will never want to keep that money when he knows that—"

"Give me the letter!" Audrey hissed. "I'll tear it up for you. Stella—Stella darling, listen to me! You are overwrought, and to-morrow you will be sorry if you have posted that confession. Destroy it—"

"No."

"You'll gain nothing by owning up," Audrey insisted cunningly. "It won't be considered a fine thing that you confessed. People will say, on the contrary, that you must have been an artful girl ever to destroy that document!"

"That is not true!" Stella panted. "Betty and the rest despise me to-night. Jess despises me, too. But this will set me right in their eyes, as nothing else would."

"It won't! Mark my words—"

Stella thrust Audrey out of the way and pressed on to the door, but even then her evil genius hung about her.

"Stella, one moment! For the last time, dear—take time to think it over. We have been such friends, dear—"

"We have been a disgrace to the school, both of us, and I for one will have no more of the hateful, wretched life!"

The vehement words were Stella's last to Audrey that night. Another instant, the girl who had wronged the Lingards was on her way down to call-over. And with her went the letter that would mean full atonement for that wrong.

Downstairs, the hall and passages teemed with other scholars, and amongst these were the chums of the Fourth Form, including Jess. Stella went past them all, straight to the post-box, and with a steady hand she shot the fateful letter through the slot.

Done!

She saw Jess, going into call-over, throw one arm carelessly about Polly Linton's shoulder.

"Some day soon," Stella said to herself wistfully. "Jess will come to me like that. Oh, how glad I am to have done it! How I shall sleep to-night, now my mind is at peace at last!"

Alone in Study 8, Audrey Blain was taking advantage of this last minute before call-over to ponder her position, now that she knew herself to be "dropped" by the friend who had found her out.

In a fierce whisper Audrey asked herself: "What am I to do? How—how can I go on at Morcove like this?"

She need not have troubled herself on the point.

Audrey Blain's days at Morcove would soon be at an end!

(END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.)

(Her last friend gone! How bitterly Audrey Blain must reflect over what has happened! And yet she has only herself to blame, for she has thought only of herself all along. Next week's Morcove story is entitled "When Audrey Was Expelled!" Order your copy of the SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN in advance to avoid disappointment.)