

THE PREMIER JOURNAL FOR BRITISH SCHOOLGIRLS!

The Schoolgirl's Own 2^d



**THEIR SUSPICIONS
VERIFIED!**

An incident from this
week's long complete
tale of Betty Barton
& Co.

A Splendid Complete Story of Zonia Moore and her Enemies.



IN SEARCH OF THEIR SCHOOL-CHUM!

By
MARJORIE STANTON.

Little does Zonia know that she is being made the dupe of a pair of crafty schemers. But Betty Barton & Co. have their suspicions. Will they be able to prove anything, and thus bowl out the plotters?

More Luck for Miriam.

A TELEGRAPH-BOY hopped off his red-painted bicycle at the porch of Morcove School and handed in the buff-coloured message that had brought him on this urgent errand at ten-to-nine in the morning.

"Who is this for, then?" wondered Miss Redgrave. She was just inside the porch and had thought she might as well save one of the maids the trouble of coming forward. "Miriam Loveless? Oh, one of my scholars."

"Shall I wait in case of a telegram to go off in answer?" asked the messenger smartly.

"Perhaps you had better; we won't keep you a minute," said the youthful mistress of the Fourth Form. "Here, Betty, dear!"

That girl came running up. She had been called to as she was sauntering around on the gravelled drive along with some of her chums.

"You might find Miriam Loveless, Betty, and let her have this. I fancy she is upstairs."

"Certainly, Miss Redgrave."

Morcove's Fourth Form captain looked back at her chums, flourishing the telegram she had been given, and then sped across the entrance-hall and raced upstairs.

Now that summer days were here, the school-house did not teem with boisterous girls quite so much, out of class-time. They were rare lovers of the open air, and, jumping up from breakfast nowadays generally meant a bolt for out of doors. It had been so this morning.

Betty Barton met scarcely a soul on the way upstairs, whilst the Fourth Form corridor was refreshingly quiet. Going past her own study—famous No. 12—she turned a corner and tapped at the only door which was there.

"Well, what is it?" some girl yelled out, with an obvious desire to be as insolent as possible.

"Telegram," said Betty, entering the study. "Not for you, Cora Grandways."

"Who said I wanted one?" was handsome Cora's graceless response to this. "Take the thing, Miriam—it's for you—and so let Betty clear out!"

"The boy is waiting, in case you want to wire

back," Betty said to Miriam Loveless, starting to withdraw. "You'll find him."

"Wait a bit, can't you?" Miriam exclaimed irritably, whilst she tore open the envelope. "If you are going downstairs, you can save me the trouble of— Oh, no answer!"

She added quickly, so that Betty was bound to hear before she was outside the study.

"It's from the Spenlows, in London. I've got to leave at once, and join them by the first train!"

"You lucky girl," Cora commented, with her smirking smile. "Wish I was off to London, to have a jolly old time at the theatres and—"

Betty heard no more, nor did she want to hear the rest of Cora's shallow talk. It did not interest her in the least. But the telegram itself—she could not help feeling excited about that.

Agitatedly, she went round into the main corridor, and there found Polly Linton and a few other chums just entering Study 12.

"You had a telegram, Betty?" clamoured Polly. "We came up after you, to find out if—"

"Yes, wather, bai Jove! No bad news, I twust, Betty, deah?" came from Paula Creel.

"Oh, it wasn't for me—didn't you understand?" said Betty. "It was for Miriam Loveless. I was just asked to find her. I say, though—"

She waved all the girls right into the study, then entered and closed the door.

"Miriam Loveless has been wired for by the Spenlows!"

"What!"

"Phew—"

"Bai Jove! Geals, how does this—"

"How does it affect us? That's the point!" Betty said gravely. "Supposing the Spenlows are going to stay on in London for good, and are taking Miriam away from the school?"

"Before she has been more than a week or so boarding here!" exclaimed Madge. "Yet it may be so."

"Yes," said Polly. "The Spenlows have been very unsettled, we know. They may even be going abroad, after all."

"And going to take Miriam with them," Betty

chimed in glumly. "We shall never break our hearts at losing her. Only—"

"She is under suspicion," Polly muttered with a frowning nod. "We are not sure even now that she isn't somehow concerned in the disappearance of poor Zonia. We meant to keep a watch upon her; and now—she is off to London!"

Even as the words were said the chums heard a girl go flaunting by in the corridor. It was Miriam, for a certainty, prancing away, armed with the telegram, to get leave from the headmistress.

"Bother it," Paula suddenly exclaimed with a sort of amiable indignation. "It wather leaves us in a howwid predicament, geals!"

"One thing is certain," Betty broke out. "The Spenlows have nothing whatever to do with anything Miriam herself has been up to. If anybody is mixed up in Miriam's secret goings-on, it must be her own parents. Where they are we don't know. We were wrong, evidently, in thinking that the woman at that lonely farmhouse must be Miriam's mother."

"That's so," grinned Polly. "The woman is a Mrs. Jennings right enough, and she goes out charing. Never shall I forget how she laughed at Betty and me when we called at the farmhouse and asked her point-blank—"

"Hark!"

"Bell for classes, girls!" smiled Madge ruefully.

"Oh, dear, bother!"

"Yes, wather," deplored Paula, hastily giving herself a glance in the study mirror. "Geals, I cannot say I wish the prospect of work this morning. Fwotch and algewwa on top of this mystewy we are trying to unwavel—it is wather too much for one's bwains, what?"

"For those who have brains, yes, dear," Polly said sweetly. "It was like Polly to leave off being dead serious and become the teasing madcap in one and the same instant." "You have certain claims to good looks, Paula—"

"Oh, thanks, thanks!" beamed the aristocrat of the Form at this grudging compliment. "But bwains too, what? Beauty and bwains—why, we Cweels are woenowed for very cweditable intellects! I appeal to Naomer."

For the study door had flown open, letting in that frisky imp, Naomer Nakara, Morcove's royal scholar.

"Haw, haw, haw, am I wight, Naomer deah?" chuckled Paula. "You will agwee I have my fair share of bwains, what?"

"Brains! My so-clever tame jackdaw, he has feefy time ze brain of you!" was Naomer's scathing answer. "I have just been to feed him, and he say 'Good morning, I hope you are quite well!'"

"Not weally," Paula said, obviously ready to believe it. "Bai Jove—"

"Anuzzer thing he say, my jackdaw," Naomer said, nodding impressively. "He say, 'Eef you see a duffer called Paula Creel—'"

"Bai jove, remarkable bird! But no, not weally, Naomer?"

"He say, eef I see you I am to give you his love. And so I give it to you—like this!" Naomer suddenly laughed, making a playful rush at the aristocrat of the Form and almost toppling her over. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Healp, geals! Naomer, dwop it! Not before school! My hair—my fwock—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The others escaped from the study before they should get involved in the "rumpus." Light-heartedly they trooped off downstairs to join the

first muster; but in another minute their spirits were damped again.

They saw Miriam come mincing along from the headmistress's room, smiling exultantly. To some of the Fourth Form scholars as she flaunted past them she announced jubilantly:

"I'm off to London right away! Got special leave because I have been wired for!"

Then she made her way upstairs to get together a few things for the journey. Cora was coming down, and they met on a half-landing.

"Going?"

"What do you think!" chuckled Miriam. "If Miss Somerfield hadn't given me leave I'd have taken it."

"That's the way," grinned Cora. They were still getting on well together, these two, except for occasional bickerings. It was a similarity in their selfish, pleasure-loving natures that made them gravitate to each other.

"Well, ta-ta! Hope you have a good time!"

Cora grumpily continued on her way down to the muster, whilst Miriam went along to her study at a run. She now had the "den" to herself, and as soon as she had slammed the door she was free to indulge her wicked delight.

"I'm off, hurrah!" she rejoiced softly to herself, doing a dance round the room, such was her frantic excitement. "To London, as they think—to meet the Spenlows, ha, ha, ha! But where I get to in the next day or so it will take even nosier persons than Betty Barton & Co. to find out!"

She found a small week-end bag and slammed it open on the floor, adding in a low tone of savage defiance:

"Those Study 12 girls! They can be as clever as they like. Mother and I are beating them all along the line!"

Half an hour later she cycled away from Morcove School, leaving the week-end bag to be taken along to the little roadside station where she was to join the train.

But, first of all, Miriam Loveless had to go across to Cliffedge Bungalow to see her own mother, alias "Mrs. Jennings," the woman who went out charing!

The Meaning of the Message.

"MOTHER!"

"Yes, Miriam—here I am, in here!"

Miriam darted across the entrance-lobby of the lonely bungalow, and made a breathless entry into the room from which her mother had answered.

"Morning, mother! It's all right, and I am ready to be off! Father's telegram, in the Spenlows' name, came just before morning school began. Of course, Miss Somerfield raised no objection, and so—"

"Good," nodded the crafty mother, throwing aside a duster. "Time for me, then, to stop being the Spenlows' charlady—eh, Miriam?"

At the moment the woman certainly looked the part which she had been forced to play as a means of misleading the suspicious Morcoveans. The very plainest of garments were wrapped about by a coarse apron. Her arms were bare to the elbow, and certain black-lead smears told that she had really been working hard about the bungalow in its tenants' absence.

Now, however, the coarse apron came off, and Mrs. Loveless performed a preliminary toilette at the scullery sink.

"This will have to do for the present, Miriam," she said, as she dried her hands on a kitchen towel.

"I'll not be a disgrace to you when I have had time to make myself ready for the journey, over at the farmhouse. You must lock up this place after me—"

"Yes, mother; I was thinking, I'd better not leave the key with you."

"That would never do," assented the woman. "Well, I am off now, and I shall see you again at Barncombe in time for the eleven o'clock train to Exeter. Ta-ta for the present!"

And she was gone, quitting the bungalow with the air of a "daily woman" who has suddenly been stopped off her work.

Not many parts were there in life that Mrs. Loveless could not act according to the necessity. If, for the purposes of that desperate scheme of which poor Zonia Moore was the unhappy victim, it had been necessary for Mrs. Loveless to pose as, say, a millionaire's wife at the grandest hotel in London, she would have played the part to the life.

As for Miriam, left alone in the bungalow, she was continually fidgetting as she allowed time for her mother to get well upon the way. The girl found herself peering presently into one room that was in a shocking state. The sight of it would have drawn exclamations of pained surprise from anyone who had not been prepared for the dismal scene.

"My word, what a mess!" was Miriam's own comment, as she stared into what had been the beautifully furnished drawing-room of the bungalow.

Now the room was a sorry spectacle such as any place must present when it has been practically gutted by fire.

And the Spenlows had yet to be told!

That was the unpleasant fact, the thought of which made Miriam's mouth sag at the corners.

Then suddenly she drew back a step, pulling the door round to close it with a vicious slam!

"Bother, what does it matter?" she said to herself peevishly. "No use bothering about a thing like that—after all, it was an accident! The main thing is that all is still going well as regards Zonia!"

She drifted into what had been her own room before she became a boarder at the school. There she pirouetted in front of a full-length mirror, admiring herself, glorying in the expensive clothes that were hers, and thinking—thinking how lucky it was for her that never yet had the wealthy Spenlows stood face to face with that one-time gipsy girl whose disappearance was a mystery that had baffled them all!

In spite of all the bad scares, due to the activities of those Study 12 girls, one was still safe!

Still revelling in the happy life that it meant, to be the protégé of Mr. and Mrs. Spenlow. Still enjoying at their generous hands the loving care which they would have been only too glad to bestow upon their own daughter, only she had been lost to them for years! Stolen from them when a mere baby-girl, and believed to have been reared by gipsies—even as Zonia Moore had been! But, thank goodness, the Spenlows did not suspect. They knew nothing of all the facts which went to prove that Zonia and their long-lost daughter were one and the same girl. Nor were they ever going to have the chance to find out, now! Mother and dad were seeing to that!

Miriam locked up at last, and, having pocketed the key of the bungalow, she rode away to Morcove Road railway station, there to pick up her luggage and take train to Barncombe.

No one else belonging to the school was on the fussy little local train. All the same, this girl who had all her mother's craftiness was very vigilant when the train got to Barncombe.

With the porters crying: "All change, please! On the left for the down train to Exeter!" she was full of caution as she stepped down on to the platform.

Her mother was here. A mother of whom to be proud, too, was Miriam's admiring thought. Nothing of "Mrs. Jennings," the charlady, about her mother now!

But the girl did not dare approach Mrs. Loveless, nor did that woman draw near her daughter. They even entered separate compartments of the train for Exeter, and it was not until they were alight-



WHO WAS THE GIRL? "What's your name?" asked the woman. "The shabby girl became very confused. "I—I'd rather not tell you my name," she stammered. "Well, you can't expect to get work without a name or a reference," was the woman's reply.

ing at that busy junction, some time after midday, that they came together.

Even then, anybody might have thought that the lady and the schoolgirl were strangers to each other, merely falling into talk because they happened to be going on again by the same train.

By six o'clock that evening there was an honest widow in a certain big town many a mile from Morcove who had let lodgings to a well-dressed lady and her stylish daughter.

Mrs. Loveless and Miriam were the pair. Their sitting-room on the first floor was in the front of the terrace-house, and it was strange to them, after the rural quietude of North Devon, to hear trams clanging past and the continual murmur of

workaday people whose heavy tread kept the pavements noisy.

Then, early next morning, how different from Morocco again, to hear factory sirens sounding over the busy town, and to look in vain from the windows of the lodging for a patch of blue sky. Many a tall chimney saw to it that workaday Greyton had only a dun sky to offer its myriad toilers most days in the year.

"People who have to get their livings in a wretched place like this!" Miriam exclaimed disdainfully to her mother, looking out of the front window after breakfast. "How I would hate to be one of them."

"Ay, you're like me, Miriam," chuckled Mrs. Loveless. "I never could stand work and poverty. And your father is another! Well, all the more reason why we should make a success of what we have come here to do, my girl. It may mean all the difference between your being let to grow up a grand lady, with the Spenlows' money behind you, and—your living to get!"

"I'm not forgetting that, mother," was the rather nervous answer. "What's more, if ever the Spenlows should get to know about—about Zonia, you and father would be prosecuted, wouldn't you?"

"We are not going to consider that, because it won't happen, Miriam—it mustn't," the mother said in a low, tense voice. "The danger is getting farther and farther from us. We have only to bring off this bit of secret work at Greyton successfully, and then we can pretty well feel safe for ever!"

Safe for ever!

What wonder that Miriam was all eagerness to do her part here at Greyton, when that was the promised reward.

Failure, and she would be no better off than any of the workgirls who could be seen trudging by in the busy main street. Worse off, by far, for it was certain that her parents would be in prison! But success—success meant lifelong ease.

Later in the day a strange thing took place in Miriam's bedroom at the lodgings, behind a locked door. Out of certain garments which her mother had brought along from Devonshire the girl dressed herself in such fashion that she looked quite a different being altogether.

Mrs. Loveless was with her daughter, and when Miriam had made the strange toilette there were murmurs of satisfaction from the woman.

"Yes, that's all right, my dear," approved Mrs. Loveless. "But your complexion is too fair. You need more of a sunburnt look, for Zonia Moore always has it. I know what to get you to make your skin just right."

A trip out of doors to the chemist's was the next thing, resulting in Miriam's being in possession of a very simple "make-up" before an hour was out.

Meantime, Mrs. Loveless had become quite friendly with the landlady, who was a lonely widow of very slender means. When the evening came, the lady lodger suggested treating the poor soul to the local theatre.

"My daughter doesn't care about coming, Mrs. Huntley," was the plausible announcement, "so do let me have the pleasure of taking you. Then the ticket won't be wasted."

"Isn't your daughter quite well, then, Mrs. Childers?" was the widow's sympathetic inquiry. "I've thought she looked rather pale and nervy—"

"Oh, she's always pale, Mrs. Huntley. No, the girl is all right; she just doesn't care for opera, and it's 'Carmen' they are giving at the theatre

to-night. She'll do to stay behind and guard the house, Mrs. Huntley, since you are without a maid!"

But Miriam did not remain indoors all the evening.

As soon as dusk was settling over the great town, she went to her room and dressed herself up again in those borrowed garments. Now, too, she put something on her face and neck, and over her hands and as far up her arms as the elbows, that made her skin look sunburned.

"How's that for Miriam Loveless as Zonia Moore?" she suddenly grinned to herself, taking a last glance in the mirror. "I am Zonia—but for one thing only! As for being Zonia, instead of myself—"

And she laughed harshly.

"I wouldn't be Zonia," she declared, whilst she reached up a brown hand to turn down the gas, "not for a thousand pounds or ten thousand!"

It was dark enough, when she left the house, for her not to be noticed as she passed along the thronged pavements. But did she wish to remain unnoticed?

It may have been so whilst she was still close to the lodgings. It certainly was not the case when she had worked round into the mean side streets that made up the very poorest quarter of the town.

Now and then, when passing people, she would shrink into herself as if not wanting to be seen. But the nervous evasion of other people's eyes was exaggerated, so that often it caused passers-by to give her a surprised stare when otherwise they would not have marked her going past them. It was certain they would remember seeing her.

Presently she came to a dim-lit baker's shop at the corner of a street. It was still open, and she hung about outside whilst one shawled woman finished a bit of a chat with the buxom soul behind the counter.

At last the customer left the shop, with loaves for some hungry family bulking in a string bag. Miriam went in hesitantly.

"Well, my dear, what's for you?" asked the woman of the shop, wearily giving a touch to her untidy hair.

"A pennyworth of bread, please."

"Penn'orth o' stale, do you mean?"

"Yes, please, if—if you can give me more for the penny that way."

"Why, where do you come from, then, my gal?" questioned the baker's wife, whilst she bundled half of a stale loaf into some tissue-paper. "On tramp with your folk, are you?"

"I'm looking for work myself," nervously owned the shabby-looking girl. "I—I suppose you don't know where I can get a job?"

"What sort o' job? No gal should have a difficulty in getting a place—leastways, not domestic. Have you got a character?"

"Reference, do you mean?"

"Well, yes. Summun to speak for you!"

"I—I'm afraid I haven't. But I thought perhaps someone would take me on trust? I must get work."

"But you don't mean to say you're all alone in the world! If so, it seems to me," said the baker's wife, scanning the tired girl very closely across the counter, by the dim light, "your case wants looking into! What's your name, anyhow?"

The shabby girl appeared to become very confused. She backed towards the shop doorway.

"I—I'd rather not tell you my name, just at present—"

"Oh, just as you please!" the woman of the shop

exclaimed, with a sudden loss of kindly feeling. "But you can't expect to get work, my gal, when you don't seem to have a name, let alone a character!"

Then Miriam purposely made off with a show of alarm. She congratulated herself on having done very well, so far. How she craftily repeated the rôle of a homeless girl, nervously venturing to seek work because she was at the end of her tether, there is no need to give in detail. But Miriam, when she had thrown the pennyworth of stale bread over a canal-bridge, visited at least one more shop before she hurried back to the lodgings.

The second shop was a newsagent's, which had a board in the doorway advertising vacancies for domestic helps.

Even when she had returned to the lodgings, her work for the evening was not done.

After resuming her normal attire, and eating a bit of supper, she sat down to do some writing.

By her side, as she laboriously wrote on, was a specimen of Zonia's handwriting. Miriam copied it closely, but the note she compiled was an original composition.

The deceptive missive did not go off that night. Mrs. Loveless had first to approve it. Early on the following day, however, the hand of Miriam Loveless shot a letter into one of the Greyton pillar-boxes, addressed to:

Miss Betty Barton,
Morcové School,
North Devon.

After that, the crafty work which had brought mother and daughter to Greyton was finished. Within a few hours of the posting of the letter they were gone from Mrs. Huntley's lodgings, and Greyton would see them no more!

Still Wondering.

"POLLY!"

"Yes, Betty?"

"To go back to that mystery business about Miriam Loveless," Betty Barton said. She had been standing in deep thought at the window of Study 12. "I have an idea."

"The thing to do with ideas is to out with them, Betty!"

"Well, then, what would you say to cycling out to that lonely farmhouse in the lane, now that tea is over—"

"To put the same questions to Mrs. Jennings all over again?" Polly exclaimed. "Otherwise, I don't see any reason—"

"Not to question Mrs. Jennings at all, Polly, but—to see if she is there!"

Polly realised that Betty was on to something that was not easily to be guessed at.

"To see if the woman isn't there, Betty! But supposing she isn't?"

"Why, then, don't you think it will be jolly suspicious?" Betty said triumphantly. "Her being away from her home just when Miriam is away from the school! That's my idea, Polly! There may be nothing in it; but, oh, I worry and worry about poor Zonia, and I find myself always coming back to the belief that somehow, for some strange reason, Miriam knows what has become of the poor girl!"

"Same here," Polly said emphatically. "And your idea, Betty—it's a winner! We'll go straight away—"

"Yes, wather, bai Jove!" Paula's dreamy murmur came in quite aptly, as she suddenly floated into the study. "Geals, another wipping

evening is dawning on, what? As the poet Gway, I think it was, remarked—"

"No poetry here," Polly warned, snatching up a ruler. "Whether Gray or Brown, or any other Johnny. Otherwise, you'll be Black and Blue!"

"Haw, haw, haw! Weal, Polly deah, anything for peace and quietness. Yes, wather. You geals going out? May I come?"

"It mustn't be a crowd, I'm afraid," said Betty. "But you couldn't be left behind, Paula dear?"

"Think of the brains she's got," agreed Polly.

"Oh, yes, Paula must come. And why not Naomer and Madge and Tess and Helen?"

"Certainly," assented Betty heartily. "We'll get hold of them now."

So, in a few minutes, a party of cyclists, consisting of these Morcové girls, who were practically inseparable, were pedalling along the road to Barncombe. Nor did the fact that quite a serious bit of detective work was in front of them prevent them revelling in the glorious early evening sunshine and being generally high-spirited.

Naomer's challenge to Paula to a race on a perfectly safe bit of the road provided one-bit of fun. Paula came in "nowhere." As for Naomer, there could be no question as to where she was at the end of the race.

Naomer was in the ditch!

As soon as her Serene Highness had extricated herself from the nettles and brambles, the girls spun on again, and all were as gay as larks until they sighted the lonely farmhouse.

"Now!" Betty said. "Supposing just a couple of us do the calling at the house, while the rest stay around out of sight?"

This was agreed to promptly, and at the others' request Betty and Polly were the two who went on in advance and turned aside into the by-lane.

A ride down the rough track brought them to the farmhouse-wicket. They rested their cycles against the wall, and boldly went up the flagged path to the perch. If "Mrs. Jennings" was in, they would be ready with some plausible excuse for having called.

But it was the girls' thrilling discovery that the woman of the place was not inside. Knocking at the door brought no response. When the chums listened intently, they heard not a sound.

"Gone away!" Polly said gravely. "Betty, if this doesn't look as if there was something in that theory of yours—"

"Can she only be out for a bit of shopping in Barncombe?" was Betty's doubt. "If not, then it's a highly suspicious thing, and no mistake. The woman, gone away from here at the same time that Miriam has gone from the school!"

"If only we could find out if it's a mere temporary absence," Polly said. Like the headstrong girl she was, she had begun to fume impatiently. "Any harm in having a look round at the back of the house?"

"Why not?" Betty instantly agreed, and in a flash they were scouting round the house.

No sooner were they at the back than they felt convinced that "Mrs. Jennings" was away from the district. The downstairs windows had their blinds lowered, although there was no sun at the back of the house. A coal-shed hard by the back door was locked up.

"Country people don't go to all this bother when they are simply going off for a few hours," Polly reasoned. "She's away from the house for to-night, anyhow, Betty!"

"And has been away, perhaps, ever since Miriam went off to London!"

Convinced that neither Mrs. Jennings nor



NEWS THAT STIRRED THE SCHOOL!

Wildly the scholars surged around the notice board, all jostling together. The few typewritten lines informed the school that the police were at last hopeful of tracing the missing Zonia. A girl answering to her description had been seen!

anyone else would be turning up, the two girls stepped to a bit of high ground behind the neglected garden and made signals for their chums to come and join them. A couple of minutes more, and the other girls were with Betty and Polly outside the farmhouse.

"One thing I notice," Polly suddenly commented. "They don't keep any chickens—nothing that needs to be looked after."

"From which you deduce what, Polly dear?"

"Can't you guess, duffer? You've got brains! It's a clear case of temporary occupation of the farmhouse. The tenants have been ready to dodge off at any time."

"Bai Jove, that's bwilliant reasoning," Paula beamed. "You would expect to find wabbits and things—yes, wather! Howevah, what do we do now, geals?"

"This!" Betty answered promptly, in a tense tone. "Why shouldn't we take a harmless peep inside the place? Not break in—of course not. But I see an old orchard ladder over there—"

"And there are windows upstairs that have the blinds up!" Polly burst out joyfully. "I say! If by any chance our missing Zonia has been kept in this house, we might be able to tell!"

"My gwacious, you geals have all the bwains!" Paula was forced to admit, with a rueful grin, whilst two or three of her excited chums ran to get the ladder.

Breathlessly they carried it across the weedy garden to the back wall of the house, against which they carefully reared it.

The top reached as high as the eaves, and the girls were delighted to find that it would be possible to look into what was evidently the dormer window of an attic.

"Up with you, Betty!"

"Yes, wather! Bai Jove, geals—"

"That attic," Polly muttered eagerly, starting to follow Betty up the rungs. "Ten to one, if ever Zonia did sleep under this roof, she slept in that attic!"

Then there was deep silence, except for the creaking of the ladder as it felt the combined weight of Betty and Polly.

Half-way up they were able to see into a back room on the first floor. It was a lumber-room, and never could have been occupied just lately.

But, as Betty clambered higher, reaching the very eaves of the lonely old house, and was able to peer into a dormer window in the tiled roof, she instantly gave a tell-tale gasp.

"Anything doing?" came Polly's eager whisper from a few rungs lower down.

"It is like a maid's bed-room," Betty announced to all who were excitedly attentive. "It may have slept a girl just lately."

"You mean it looks as if—"

"Yes, as if it was in use up to a little while ago."

"Bai Jove!" murmured Paula, standing below with Madge and the rest. "Yet why should—"

"Betty—Betty, can you see anything that you can recognise as having belonged to Zonia?" clamoured Polly.

"I am trying to see if there is anything, girls. No," Betty announced next moment. "No, there's nothing. All we can be sure of is that a girl may have been slept in that room. I'm coming down."

Polly accordingly ran nimbly down the rungs, and Betty was not slow about descending. The ladder was carefully returned to its original resting-place amongst the jungle of weeds, and then the chums stood and looked at one another.

Once again they were seized with the gravest misgivings.

It was their own dear Zonia about whom they were so anxious. Zonia, the one whose fate was all unknown!

Were they, then, slowly but surely getting to the bottom of a mystery that had never even been suspected by those who had vainly sought the runaway?

Or were they only finding one mare's nest after another?

Betty & Co. were not going to enjoy becoming the laughing stock of the school. On the other hand, they would never forgive themselves if they kept silent when they should have confided their suspicions, however vague, to Miss Somerfield.

"I think we had better have word with her," Betty suddenly exclaimed, and she was relieved to find every one of her chums in entire agreement with her.

"Miss Somerfield will think we are out of our minds, that's certain," grimaced Polly. "Still, we are going to be on the safe side."

"Yes, wather. I myself haven't quite got the hang of your theowies, you know. All the same," beamed Paula, "I thowoughly approve of your pwopounding them to the headmistwess, what?"

When the girls had taken time to smile at Paula's usual high-flown language, Polly resumed impressively:

"This is the position, Paula—so attend!"

"Yes, wather!"

"Our Zonia disappeared for an unknown reason

about the time that Miriam came to live at Cliff-edge Bungalow with the Spenlows."

"I appreciate the fact, Polly dear!"

"Well, now. Miriam all along has seemed to get very flustered every time we have talked about the mystery of Zonia."

"And don't forget," put in Madge Minden gently, "Miriam seemed to be more glad than sorry when that picture of Zonia got destroyed."

"I remember, geals—"

"Then, to deepen the mystery," continued Polly, "we know that the girl's own parents were believed to have been seen in this district by Mrs. Spenlow, at a time when they were supposed to be nowhere near Morcove. That was what made us wonder if the woman at this farmhouse was Miriam's mother, under an assumed name—"

"Pwecisely! But what has all that to do with Zonia!"

"Ah," Betty laughed forlornly, "that's the puzzle! But Zonia still remains unheard of, and—and—oh, come on, girls! We shall have to get Miss Somerfield to understand what a vague suspicion it is. We are going to tell her, anyhow."

But, for the best possible reason, the girls did not confide their suspicions to Miss Somerfield, after all, when they got back to the school.

Going first of all to their various studies, to take off their outdoor things and run a comb through their hair after the brisk ride home, they found that the evening delivery of letters had been distributed. And in Study 12 there was one letter, at sight of which Betty cried out in great excitement.

"Why, Polly—look here! Look—look, the handwriting—"

"Zonia's!" fairly shouted the Form captain's chum. "Another letter from Zonia! My goodness, Betty—"

"Greyton, the postmark," Betty said feverishly, whilst she set a finger ripping open the envelope. "Where is Greyton?"

"Up towards the midlands, I fancy. Here, girls, what do you think," Polly rushed on wildly as Paula and the others came flocking in, "another letter from Zonia!"

"Bai Jove—"

"Read, read it out!" was the clamorous chorus, whilst Naomer capered around, urging in her own excitable way:

"Ooo, yes, queek—queek! Let us hear what Zonia has to say!"

The False Trail Followed!

BETTY opened out the letter, and read aloud: "My dear Betty,—I feel I must write to you again, for I know how anxious you must all be.

"I am a long way from Morcove now, dear Betty, and, of course, I often long to be with you again. But otherwise I am very happy, so please don't worry.

"I hope to get some work to do here that will keep me going. It is a big town I have got to, and I ought to stand a chance of a situation.

"Dear Betty, I am not sending you my address, as I still don't want anyone to come after me. Some day you will know why I went away from my school so strangely. Until then—

"Your loving ZONIA.

"P.S.—Love to all the girls and to Mr. and Mrs. Barton."

From this brief epistle Betty raised her eyes at last, to see her chums staring blankly.

If anything, they seemed to be more astounded than ever.

"Queer note about that letter, isn't there?" Polly exclaimed. "Not like Zonia's other message."

"Cool isn't the word for it," Madge murmured distressfully. "It's cold, that letter. Sends her love in a postscript!"

"As if it was an afterthought," rejoined Tess. "I don't know, this is queerer than anything!"

"Bai Jove, wather! When you think, geals, how gweately attached to us Zonia was—"

"She not love us any more!" Naomer burst out dolefully. "Ohé, I am sad! Because I feel I not ever able to leave off loving Zonia."

Betty swallowed her mortification.

"Anyhow, girls, she is still safe and well. That's the great thing. And when she kept back her address she was forgetting that the envelope would bear the postmark! Greyton—Greyton! Now we know where she is to be sought."

"Yes, wather! And so, geals, all our theowies about Mrs. Jennings, bai Jove, and the lonely farmhouse—"

"No need to trouble Miss Somerfield with our suspicions now," Betty decided unhesitatingly. "This letter—and, oh, how welcome it is, although it certainly might have been in more loving language—we'll pass it on to Miss Somerfield at once, and hold our tongues about the rest."

"I really think we had better," approved Madge soberly. "Greyton is a long way off. Zonia cannot have been making slowly right across country and at the same time have been in the hands of Mrs. Jennings."



COULD IT BE POSSIBLE? "Betty, Polly, Paula!" gasped Tess, as she rushed into the study. "You will never believe me, but I have come rushing back to tell you I have just seen Zonia!"

"No, it's a wash-out about the lonely cottage!" was Polly's breezy way of expressing herself. "And so, after all, Miriam must be sort of acquitted. Well, all the better!"

"Yes, wather! It was going to be a bad business—what?"

That relieved remark from Paula ended the discussion. Betty was already turning to quit the room, and she gave her chums a look that invited them to go with her to the headmistress.

Inside of half an hour the entire school was thrilling with the news.

Betty Barton had heard again from Zonia Moore!

This time, too, the letter had come by post, so there was a hope of tracing the girl in the town which the postmark had named.

Out of doors, girls knocked off from their tennis and other games to discuss the latest development. As dusk drew on, it became known that already Miss Somerfield had communicated with the police, and they were causing inquiries to be made immediately at Greyton.

Things seemed to be moving now. Betty and lots of other girls hated the idea of going up to bed at the usual time. The feverish idea had got hold of them that news would come in at any moment now, over the 'phone, to the effect that Zonia had already been traced in Greyton—found at long last!

If only—oh, if only it could be!

But last thing of all that night the chums in their prayers still had to remember a loved one who was missing. The 'phone had yet to bring that longed-for message.

Betty's parents wired from Ribbleton that they were going to Greyton to help in the search, and how the whole Study 12 coterie would have liked to chase off to Greyton themselves! All interest seemed to have been transferred from Morcove to Greyton. There was nothing to be done at this end—nothing, except lessons!

At midday Miss Somerfield considerably allayed the terrible suspense by causing the latest information to be posted on the notice-board.

Wildly the scholars surged around, the smallest jostling amongst the seniors. The few typewritten lines informed the school that the police were hopeful. A girl answering to Zonia's description had been seen in the town as late as the evening before last. She had then been inquiring for work.

"Then they've as good as got her!" was Polly's sanguine assertion. "She'll never get away now."

"For her own dear sake, let's hope not," murmured Madge. "Poor Zonia, what a shame it is, her being hunted for, as if she had done something dreadful!"

"Geals, pway wemember, the day Zonia is brought back," Paula beamed, infected with the general hopefulness. "I give the whole Form the biggest spread that evah was! Yes, wather! I feel I must, don't you know! The relief—what? Yes, wather!"

"Ooo, yes, queek—queek!" came from Naomer, as she dragged Paula away. "Let us order ze spread at once, then! For I zink ect will be soon—to-day—that they find her!"

Once again, if only it could be!

The girls were looking back and thinking what an age of anxiety it had been for them. Was it really coming to an end at last—to-day, perhaps? Oh, surely the police, with all their experience and their organisation, would catch the poor runaway at last!

But the hours dragged by, and still Morcove School was waiting for the joyful news to come in by 'phone or telegram.

The one bit of news that the scholars did receive, a couple of hours after tea, was very tame by comparison.

It was simply that Miriam Loveless had reported back from London!

Stranger than Ever.

SOME of the Study 12 chums were just going down to tennis when Miriam Loveless came mincing along the Fourth Form corridor, to go to her study.

They gave her a good look, to which she responded with an insolent stare. Betty & Co. shrewdly suspected her of a desire to put out her tongue at them. But, there, so long as they could suspect nothing worse than that, what did it matter?

In the study round the corner, Miriam found Cora asprawl in a chair, hands clasped behind her fair head, her legs astraddle.

"Hallo, Mirry! Heard you were back. Had a nice time?"

"Topping, thanks!"

"Thought you were going to be away for a week, at least."

"Oh, well, my people never seem to know what they are going to do from one day to another!" Miriam shrugged.

"Anyhow, I suppose the Spenlows took you to theatres and things. It's been beastly dull without you, Mirry. You've heard the latest about Zonia Moore?"

"She's been traced to Greyton? Yes, Miss Somerfield was telling me just now!" Miriam answered airily. "So Betty Barton had another letter from the girl!"

"That's so," Cora said, watching her croun rather narrowly.

But, if Cora also had formed suspicions, there was nothing in Miriam's demeanour to confirm them.

"I'd like to cycle across to the bungalow," Miriam said carelessly. "Not that there is any need, but I'm longing for a cig. One can always get a smoke there."

"I'll come, too," Cora eagerly offered, jumping up. "Yes, let's, Mirry!"

"Oh, perhaps I'd better not!" Miriam suddenly changed her mind. "After all, it only depresses one to go over to the bungalow and be reminded of the fire. Look here, what about tennis for once?"

"Tennis—urr!" grimaced Cora. "Awful bore! I thought you hated games as much as I do."

"Yes, but just for once!"

"Oh, all right!"

In giving in to the suggestion, Cora was not without a sudden suspicious fancy that the tennis was to be Miriam's artful way of impressing the Form in general with her freedom from worry. It certainly was not Miriam's nature to go in for games. But, then, perhaps the Spenlows had been giving her a talking-to up in London.

The pair who had become such cronies took their racquets and went down to the courts, playing a few singles. At an adjacent court, Betty & Co. were trying to feel keen upon some doubles, but it was no use. Their minds were running on the crisis connected with missing Zonia.

When—when would the news come in that she had been found at Greyton? If she was not to

be traced in that town, and at once, where and when would she be?

They did not fail to mark Miriam's unusual presence on the courts. The suspicion that her care-free hour with the racket must be a blind was a mere fleeting one. Perhaps the Spenlows had impressed her with the necessity of going in for games. Anyhow, matters in connection with Zonia had developed in a way that entitled Miriam to be acquitted of all complicity in the runaway's continuance in hiding. Such was the fair-minded opinion of the chums.

Now, it seemed to them, the only objection to Miriam Loveless was that she was a second Cora Grandways for impudent animosity. Of course, Cora and Miriam made themselves an annoyance to the girls playing on the adjacent court, and this helped to make Betty & Co. "pack up."

But the main reason for the chums' trailing off to the schoolhouse was their anxiety for news. Miss Redgrave, chancing to be coming away from the porch, had them all round her in an instant, clamouring for information.

"Nothing come through, Miss Redgrave? Oh, isn't there any news at all?"

"I wouldn't be taking it as calmly as this if there was," the popular assistant-mistress answered, with a sad shake of the head. "No, girls, we are still waiting. But surely it cannot be long now!"

Then the chums drifted on again, having no words for their suspense.

Madge found her way to the music-room piano. Tess went to her study to get a sketch-block and box of water-colours. With these, she resolutely went off to do a bit of sketching. It seemed the best thing to do, pass the fretful time by indulging one's keenest taste.

In the same way, Helen resorted to the library for one of her favourite authors, whilst Dolly Delane tackled ladders in some stockings. Naomer could doubtless be found teaching her tame jackdaw to talk more "English," à la Naomer!

As for Betty and Polly, they had Paula with them in Study 12, where all was deep silence. Paula sighed anxiously now and then, as she sat deep in the armchair, thinking of Zonia. Polly was helping Betty with some of the captaincy work.

Nor did this glum state of things end as the sun's last rays were withdrawn from the romantic world of Morcove and dusk came creeping on. The longer the suspense continued, the more desperate was the need to keep one's mind off it.

"Bai Jove, it's getting dark!" Paula sadly lamented by-and-by, causing Polly to exclaim testily, in the middle of some reckoning up of figures:

"What a one you are for stating the obvious, Paula! You'll be telling us Zonia is found when she is here in this study again!"

"Sowwy!" Paula apologised dolefully. "Don't be crows, Polly, deah!"

"Well, don't interrupt when I am adding up!"

Polly atoned for this stern remark by flinging a loving glance at Paula. Then the inveterate teaser resumed her totting up of some account-book which Betty, as captain, kept in connection with one of the Form clubs.

Presently Paula sighed again lamentably.

"Ah, dear!"

"What's the matter now?"

"Nothing, Polly, deah. I am merely westless."

"I was thinking you were pretty restful, considering! Here, out of that chair, and come and

make yourself useful! Go over my addition, will you, Paula, dear?"

"Er—er— All wight, most willingly," Paula said, sadly rising. "I twust you wealise, how-evah, awithmetic is not my stwong point. Geals, I wondah if they have found Zonia yet at Gwey-ton? Wealy and twuly, I—"

"Oh!" Polly groaned, and reached for a ruler. One the other side of the table, Betty grinned, but continued with the work.

"What's the twouble now, Polly, deah? I merely expressed the gweat anxiety—"

"Aren't we all anxious?" cried Polly, with what seemed terrible fury. "Aren't we all worried to death?"

"Yes, wather!"

"Then what are you grouching about?"

"Gwousing Polly, deah—me? No, so! You labour undah a misapprehension! Shall I go wight away?"

"No, you'll do that sum!"

"Er—wight you are! Er— Yes, wather! I merely wemark, Polly, that at this time of the evening it becomes wathor a stwain on one's eyesight, not to say one's bwain-power—"

"Hark!" Betty and Polly both exclaimed gravely, starting up from their chairs. "Who is that coming at a run along the corridor? News—is it news?"

"Bai Jove! Geals—"

"Hallo, Tess! Yes, what is it?" Betty and Polly again voiced together, as the girl artist of the Form came rushing in, all out of breath. "There is news at last, then! You have just heard—"

"No, worse luck!" panted Tess, casting down her sketching things upon a chair. "It isn't what I have heard, but what I have seen. Betty, Polly, Paula—"

"Well, what?"

"Bai Jove!"

"You will never believe me!" gasped on Tess. "Yet I have come rushing all the way back to school to tell you. I have just seen Zonia—Zonia!"

Another Look at That Letter.

"SEEN Zonia!" Polly was the first to cry out incredulously. "My dear Tess—"

"Impossible!" Betty exclaimed tensely.

"Think, Tess—"

"Yes, I know!"

"Zonia is known to have been at Greyton, right away towards the midlands, within the last day or two. So—"

"That's what I have been saying to myself," Tess nodded, still heaving for breath. "How is it possible? Even if she had the money to come by train—"

"She can't have had money for train fares!" Polly exclaimed.

"And there has not been time for her to walk," insisted Betty. "How on earth, then—"

"Bai Jove, Tess, it wequires explaining—what?"

"You'll not get me to account for it, because I own to being fairly staggered, bewildered!" was Tess's helpless answer. "All I know is, just now, in the twilight on the seashore, when I was finishing my sketch, I glimpsed someone—a girl—who was Zonia to the life!"

"You only saw her in the twilight," Betty remarked, "and yet you are so certain?"

"Positive, yes! It was not her clothes, nor her looks," Tess said. "She was too far off, and the light was too far gone, for me to know

her by those. But the way she flitted out of sight was Zonia exactly when she was on the go. You remember what a special one she was for swiftness."

The three listeners nodded.

"We always used to say that Zonia was as fleet as a deer."

"And what I want to know is this," went on Tess. "If it was not Zonia, making another dash to avoid being seen, what girl was it?"

"Well, it's a lick!" said Polly. "Even if Zonia could have got back from Greyton so quickly, why should she return, and yet not want to disclose herself?"

"Wait a bit!" Betty said suddenly. "Just a sec., girls!"

So saying, she clicked on the electric light, and then darted to the table. Pulling open the table-drawer on her side, she took out a letter.

It was the one that had come from Greyton.

"Now, then, where's a magnifying-glass?" the Form captain said excitedly. "We are going to have another look at this letter, girls."

"But what—"

"It seemed to be different in tone from Zonia's usual style. We'll see if the handwriting is a shade different, too," was the grim remark with which Betty electrified her chums.

Next second the study door had been closed, and Polly, for one, was triumphantly bringing out a large magnifying-glass from a drawer in the study table.

"This'll do the trick!" she said jubilantly.

"Bai Jove, geals!"

"And here is an authentic letter of Zonia's, by which we can test the Greyton one," Betty broke out, rummaging another missive from the table-drawer. "If there is any difference—"

"Bai Jove," Paula breathed again, "it will simply mean, geals, that—that—"

"We shall know what it means!" Polly smiled, handing over the magnifying-glass. "There, Betty, you have the first squint!"

That girl eagerly seized the glass. With the electric light drawn low down, so as to shine strongly upon both letters, the scrutiny began.

In great excitement, Betty's chums stood by whilst she first looked closely at the Greyton letter through the magnifying-glass, and then at an old letter of Zonia's.

"Well, Betty?"

"See what you think," was the terse remark, and now Polly had what she called "a squint."

She spent a half-minute with the glass; then let Tess have a turn.

"Zonia never wrote the Greyton letter!" was Polly's downright assertion, whilst Tess was still comparing the two missives. "With the glass, you can see a world of difference!"

"My gwacious!" palpitated Paula. "Then, if Zonia did not write the Gweyton letter, who did?"

"Ah," muttered Betty, "that's the next question!"

"Easy to guess, I fancy," Tess said, as she set down the letters and the glass. "Miriam was away from the school at the time."

"Miriam? Bai Jove!"

"Sh!" Betty glanced at the closed door. "Can't be too careful now. But let's think it out. Miriam went to London, not Greyton."

"How do we know?" asked Polly promptly. "We have only her word for it—and the telegram which called her away."

"And the telegram may have been a faked one," rejoined Tess simply.

"Sent by Miriam's own mother or father, and not by the Spenlows!" Polly rushed on brilliantly. "We've got it!"

"Bai Jove, geals, you'll wun past yourselves—"

"No," Betty said steadily; "Polly is right. We've got it. And so all our former suspicion of Miriam is revived! Remember, too, the woman at the farmhouse was away at the same time."

"Bai Jove, that's true!"

Polly struck the table with her clenched hand. "Miriam and that woman were away at Greyton together! Miriam never went to London to see the Spenlows!"

"And Zonia has never been to Greyton. She may never have been out of this district for a single day!" Betty took up the excited talk. "That accounts for Tess seeing her just now. She is close to the school all the while!"

"Geals, a little more of this, and I—I shall dwop!" Paula warned them, whilst she beamed her admiration of their astuteness. "Bai Jove, you know, it's pwetty thwilling—what!"

"It's another step, that's what it is," said Polly. "And the next must be—what? A talk with Miss Somerfield? Or had we better wait, even now, and make dead certain?"

There was a moment during which all four girls stood frowning with perplexity.

"It means bringing a most serious charge against Miriam," Betty reminded the others, "and, in one respect, it is still only guesswork. Miss Somerfield will agree that the Greyton letter is a mere imitation of Zonia's handwriting, but that is not to say that Miriam wrote it. Supposing we wait a bit, and—"

There was a sudden interruption. The door had opened, in front of Miss Redgrave.

"I haven't come with the news that Zonia is found, girls—only wish I had," the Form-mistress said ruefully. "Betty, I fancy I saw Miriam Loveless go off on her bicycle to the bungalow a few minutes ago. She should not have left it so late. Will you go after her, and see that she returns at once? Say I sent you to companion her, for it will be quite dark before you get back. Polly might go with you."

That was all. Just one of those little missions that Miss Redgrave was so fond of getting Study 12 to perform, knowing that the two girls could be relied upon. Miss Redgrave went away, and downstairs pelted Betty and Polly, all eagerness to go after Miriam.

"Bai Jove, breathed Paula, left alone with Tess, "things seem to be regularly working up—what! I have a stwong pwesentiment, Tess, deah, that it won't be long now, anyhow, before the whole baffling mystery is unwavelled!"

Only Another Day.

IN the deep dusk of the summer's evening, Miriam dismounted from her bicycle within a couple of hundred yards of Cliffedge Bungalow.

Leaving the machine leaning against the grassy roadside bank, she went leisurely across the springy turf of the headland to the wicket-gate. She was in no nervous mood, and had not come away from the school for any reason connected with the daring scheme to which she had been a party all along.

The sudden jaunt in the twilight had been prompted by a mere wayward impulse. Life as a boarder at Morcove was proving as irksome as ever, and she had felt she must slip away for a half-hour or so, if only to get a smoke!

Suddenly, however, as the lawless girl was passing in at the garden gate, she stood stock still, peering through the half-darkness at a figure which was advancing in her direction from beyond the other side of the bungalow's plot of ground.

Next second Miriam was casting her eyes around to make sure that no other figure was in sight. Convinced that this was so, she went to meet the person who was sharing the solitude with her.

"That you, mother?" Miriam whispered calmly. "Funny we should both chance to be here! I only came across to have a look round."

"I came—you can guess why, Miriam," Mrs. Loveless said darkly. "I wish to be quite certain that Zonia is all right, in the place where I put her. Now I must hurry back to the farmhouse."

"Won't you come indoors for a moment, mother? It's quite safe," Miriam said airily. "The other scholars are all indoors at the school,

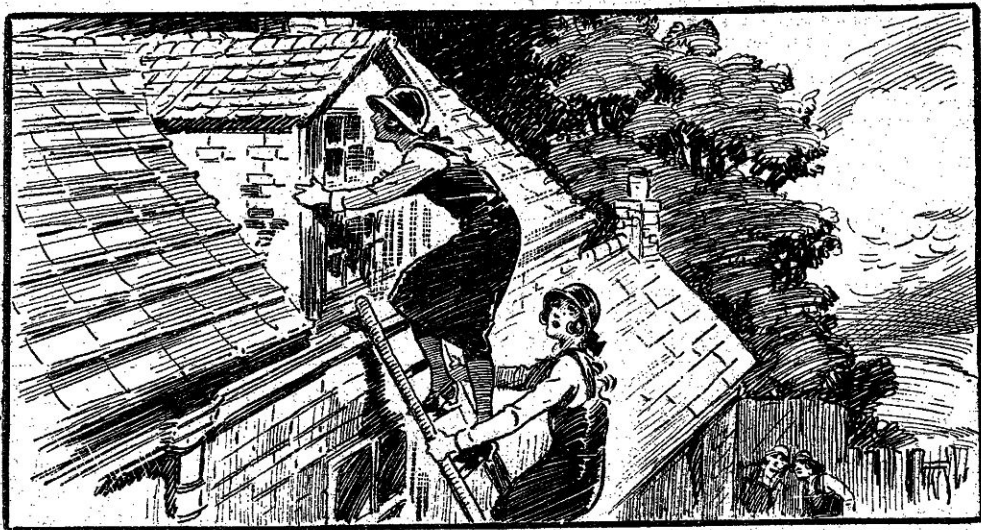
is out of the question," was Mrs. Loveless's dissenting murmur. "What with the risk of those girls at the school still watching the farmhouse, and the risk of the Spenlows coming back to this bungalow, the need for haste is desperate."

She added, after puckering her lips, whilst pondering:

"Ah, well, one more night and day for the girl where she is, and then I'll have her where she'll be as good as dead to all the old associations—the other end of England! Miriam, you ought to be precious grateful to me and your father for the way we have saved your future."

"I am, mother. I never forget what would have happened if the Spenlows had got acquainted with that Zonia. After all, though, you and father stand to gain by it all."

"We don't mean to be the worse off for it, you may be sure!" Mrs. Loveless gave back, with her crafty smile. "Well, Miriam, I must be off,



HOT ON THE SCENT! Betty clambered higher until she was able to peer into a dormer window in the tiled roof, and then she gave a gasp. "Anything doing?" came Polly's eager whisper. "It looks as though a girl has been sleeping here lately," was Betty's reply.

expecting at any moment to hear that Zonia has been found at Greyton!"

She chuckled, and so did her mother, whilst the pair of them went in at the gate and advanced to the bungalow porch.

Miriam produced the key, and they stepped inside, closing the front door after them.

"Well, I'm not sorry to have this chance to talk with you, Miriam," the mother said, after a candle had been lit. "I had a surprise when I got home to the farmhouse, a few hours ago—a letter."

"From father?"

"And welcome news, too," the mother said, with a nod. "At last he has found somewhere for me to rejoin him, with Zonia, where we shall be quite safe. It is at the other end of the kingdom, Miriam."

"That's a blessing!" the girl commented fervently. "So, I suppose, you are going to take Zonia away at once—to-night? You ought to, mother."

"I only wish I could, this very night, but that

and so must you. And mind you behave at the school, my girl, so that the Spenlows have only good accounts of you!"

Miriam laughed lightly.

"All right, mother! I know the Spenlows, though. So long as they are without their own long-lost daughter, they'll never weary of petting me. Can you see, if I blow out the light?"

Without waiting for an answer, she puffed her breath at the candle-flame, and then the pair of them groped their way to the porch door.

Miriam was as much at ease as ever when she drew back the latch and set the door open. Next second, however, she was giving a gasp of dismay.

The mother also became a prey to great alarm. She drew back a step, and gestured wildly to Miriam, who quickly closed the door again.

They had both seen, or fancied they had seen, two shadowy forms lurking in the now night-bound garden.

"Morcov scholars, were they?" Mrs. Loveless

whispered. "They looked too small to be grown-ups."

"Bother it!" raged Miriam. "Two girls, I suppose, been sent to fetch me home to the school. Mother, I must go. You stay here."

"And get away afterwards—yes, that's what I must do," the mother assented softly. "Oh, how I wish now that I could smuggle Zonia right away to the other end of the country this very night!"

"Isn't it possible, mother?"

"Out of the question, I tell you. But it's only another day, thank goodness! Go on, Miriam, and it's good-bye for perhaps a long while!"

"Good-bye, then, mother, and good luck!"

Not another word was whispered. Mrs. Loveless retreated further into the deep darkness of the bungalow, whilst Miriam reopened the porch door and stepped forth.

Pulling the door to behind her with a loud slam, she made a show of being in a jaunty mood. To add to this effect, she even whipped out a packet of cigarettes, set one between her lips, and struck a light.

Even as the tiny flame was illumining her handsome face, two girls stepped up to her from out the surrounding darkness.

"You won't have time for that cigarette, Miriam," spoke Betty Barton composedly. "You are to come back at once!"

"All right!" Miriam laughed, dropping the cigarette and stamping on it. "I'd better be a model of obedience for once. Ha, ha! I have led you girls rather a life, haven't I? How long have you been here?"

"Oh not so long!" was the answer.

"You came on your bikes, of course."

"Left them back yonder in the road," said Polly, "close to yours."

"Come on, then!" Miriam cried, quite amicably. The growing belief that these two girls had glimpsed no one but herself helped her to maintain a half-insolent levity.

"I suppose they have not found Zonia yet?" she asked carelessly, as they all three moved off towards the road.

"No," said Betty, "but I don't think it will be long now."

"Neither do I!" chimed in Polly breezily. "That letter from Greyton has made all the difference in the world!"

Then a silence fell, except that Miriam was humming serenely as she stepped along. That letter from Greyton! Ha, ha! How splendidly it had laid a false trail for the police to follow up! As for this Study 12 couple, they little knew who had penned that letter, the crafty girl was exulting.

But Betty and Polly did know, as it happened.

What they did not know, alas, was that only another day was being granted them, by Fate itself, in which to achieve a very triumph of amateur detective work, or else miss the very last chance of ever seeing poor Zonia again!

(END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.)

One more day! What will happen during that day? Will Betty & Co. get on the track of their missing chum, or will the Lovelesses be successful in their cruel scheme of parting Zonia from the parents she does not know? On no account must you miss reading of the many thrilling things which happen in next week's splendid long complete tale, which is entitled: "Study Twelve's Triumph!"

COOKERY HINTS

Catering for a Garden Party.

LAST half holiday, Miss Grill, who lives in a delightful house possessing a large garden, gave a garden party and invited all the girls of her class to attend.

We had a ripping time, and, of course, lots of good things to eat, most of them prepared by Miss Grill herself. Here are a few of the recipes.

Queen Cakes.

Required: Three and a half ounces of flour, two ounces of margarine, two ounces of castor sugar, three ounces of picked and washed currants, a quarter of an ounce of citron peel, half a small teaspoonful of baking powder, two teaspoonfuls of strained lemon juice, one egg, and a little cold milk.

These cakes belong to the variety known as simple "fairy" cakes, are delicious, simple to make, and a

certain success if the following easy method is carried out.

First weigh the ingredients carefully. Put the margarine in a basin, and stir it with a wooden spoon, with an even movement, until the margarine is creamy. Then add the sugar, and continue creaming the two ingredients, until they look like cream. This will take about ten minutes, and is easier if two take turns at the work.

Add the beaten egg gradually with the flour, stirring the mixture the while. If the mixture is too stiff, add just a little cold milk to complete the mixing. Add the lemon juice, citron peel chopped finely, and baking powder, and stir them well in.

Grease small fancy tins—these should be prepared before the cakes are mixed—dust them out with flour, sprinkle a few currants in the bottom of each tin, put the mixture in the tins, sprinkle the remainder of the currants over the tops of the cakes.

Bake the cakes in a moderate oven until well risen, and nicely browned. Time, about twenty minutes.

A Simple Ice Cream.

Scald one pint of milk, beat two eggs, allow the milk to cool a little, pour it over the eggs, stir, sugar and flavour the custard to taste. Return it to the saucepan, and stir over a slow heat until the custard thickens. Don't allow it to boil.

Freeze the custard in a freezing machine, and serve the ice cream with wafer biscuits on fancy or glass plates.

Strawberries and raspberries, arranged on cool green leaves, and then stood on pretty plates and served with cream, was another tempting cool dish.

DOLLY HOPE.

ANSWERS

EVERY MONDAY...PRICE 2: