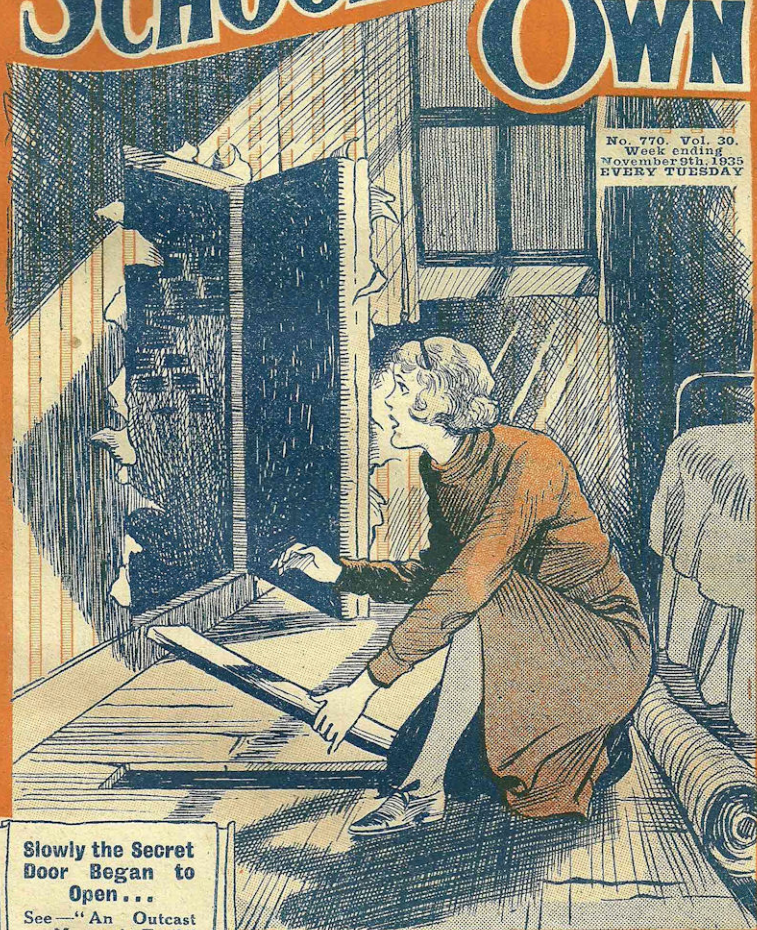


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Enthralling Stage and Adventure Serial Begins Inside

The SCHOOLGIRLS' 2^D OWN

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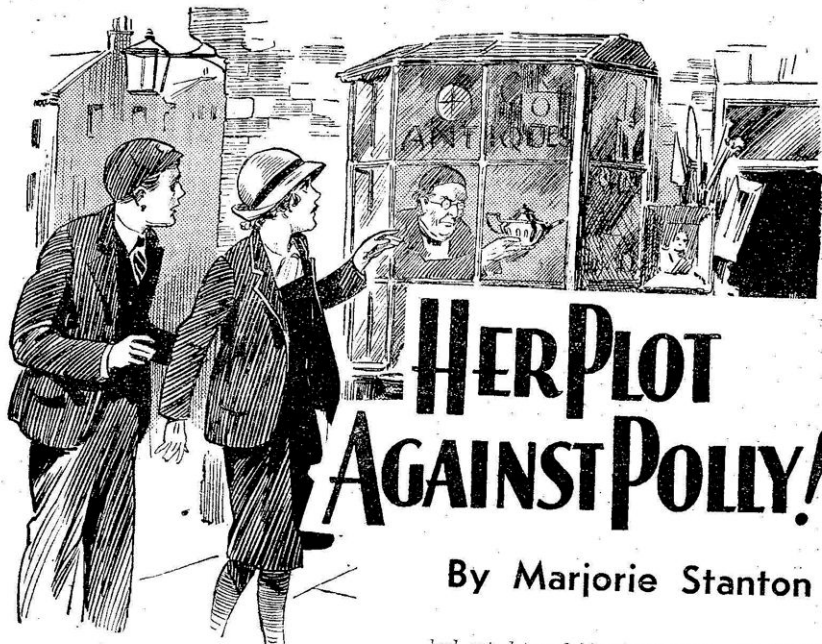


Slowly the Secret
Door Began to
Open...

See—"An Outcast
on Mystery's Trail"
—Inside.

Meet "HER HARUM-SCARUM HIGHNESS" in This Issue

Magnificent, Long COMPLETE Story of the Chums of Morcove, in Which a Vindictive Girl Begins to Weave—



HER PLOT AGAINST POLLY!

By Marjorie Stanton

Grangemoor at Morcove!

"Oh, Jack—so glad you've come!"
"Why, what, Betty? Anything the matter?"

"You may be able to cheer up Polly. We girls can't, no matter how we try!"

"What's wrong? Polly been getting into a row, then?"

"Oh, no! But she's had a nasty upset."

A few moments since, Jack Linton had come riding in by the main gateway at Morcove School, full of his usual jollity. But that natural gaiety was forsaking him now that Betty Barton, leader of the Study 12 chummers, had begun with such disquieting remarks about his sister Polly.

Jack was not accustomed to hearing that his sister needed cheering up! She was the reputed madcap of the Form at Morcove, just as he himself was the life and soul of a certain group of study-mates at Grangemoor School.

He stalled his machine against a garden seat just inside the gateway, then turned to Betty in eagerness for fuller news.

It was Saturday afternoon—a halfer at both schools. An hour ago, Jack had helped Challenger's House, at Grangemoor, to score the winning goal in a great match. He had come out of the fray with a bruised shoulder; but this

had not deterred him from setting off with his four best pals to do the cycle ride to Morcove.

Only, he had thought it best to ride direct to his sister's school, whilst his four chums took in Barncombe town on the way, to call at the famous Creamery. Hence his arrival at Morcove a few minutes in advance of Tom Trevor, Jimmy Cherrol, Dave Cardew, and "hefty" Tubby Bloot.

"Where is Polly, Betty?"

"In Study 12. She wasn't in our team for the hockey match; didn't even come to look on. We simply can't get a smile out of her, Jack."

"But why not?"

The brisk stride with which he expected Betty to keep pace showed how eager he was to get to

Though Polly is the target for another girl's enmity, it is her innocent brother who suffers most!

the Morcove schoolhouse and find Polly in this strange mood of hers.

"I'll explain in a few words, Jack, and then, when we get upstairs, we'll keep off the subject. We held a rummage sale to help the Barncombe Children's Hospital. It was great fun at the time,

with Polly as auctioneer. But during the night, after the sale, money resulting from the sale was stolen from Polly's table drawer, in Study 12."

"Stolen, Betty?"

"Yes. And everything, next morning, pointed to a new housemaid—a beginner, not much older than some of us girls. Her name is Effie Barnard. Polly was in an awful state of mind—you know what she is, Jack—"

"I do! I suppose she went off the deep end and—"

"She did rather raise her voice, and Miss Merriock chanced to hear. Result—sack for Effie Barnard. She was out of the place in a few hours."

"Gosh! And Polly was the one who had—"

"Yes; in any case, of course, it must have left Polly very unhappy. But the worst of it is, Jack, soon after Effie had been sacked, we found out something that made it look as if she were innocent after all."

As Betty had expected, this fetched Jack to a dead stop, with horrified eyes upon her.

"Great Scott! But, of course, you lost no time about putting the matter right for the poor girl?"

"That's the rotten thing about it, Jack; we couldn't! To do that, we would have had to prove the case against the other girl who appeared to be the thief, and we simply hadn't it in our power, so there!"

"Who is the other girl, Betty? A Morcove girl?"

"Yes! You mustn't breathe a word, Jack. If you do, it may ruin all chance of proving it against her in the end, as we hope to do. If we fail, then—well, poor Effie!"

Jack nodded. He was as quick in feeling sympathy as he was quick in the "uptake."

"The other girl—the one who did it, Betty—belongs to your Form?"

"No! She's a senior—Vanessa Ducrane. And that, Jack, is all I shall say for the present. You can go into it all, better, presently—you and Polly together, perhaps. But I shouldn't start about it directly you get to the study."

"Oh, no. Just be the perfect ass, as usual—eh? Right-ho, Betty; I get you! But—Hollo!" he broke off, whilst glancing behind half-way up the drive. "Here are the other chaps. So I'll report in with them."

He stood to await them, waving gaily, and Betty lingered.

The Morcove games field was almost deserted now, for it was tea-time. Jack and his pals had all been expected, and if the entire Study 12 crowd was not here to greet them, that was only because the boys were a bit before their usual time—Jack especially.

Now Bunny Trevor, Tom's sister, came flying out of the schoolhouse, and with her came Dave Cardew's sister Judy, and two or three more girls. But Polly Linton—she was not one of those who put in an appearance.

Five minutes later, Betty hastened down the Form corridor to Study 12, finding Polly accompanied only by a very sympathetic but futile Paula Creel. All that well-meaning Paula was able to do, by imploring Polly not to "wowwy," was to get Polly to look more irritable than ever.

"The boys are here, Polly!"

"Oh, are they?"

"So come on down, dear!"

As Study 12 simply could not accommodate such a big party as it would be, Betty and Co. and the boys were to have tea at the Form's table in the school's dining-room.

The fact that Tubby Bloot would be amongst the visitors had given a big fillip to Naomer's usual

zeal about catering arrangements. She and Tubby were two minds with but a single thought, and that thought concerned nice things to eat.

"Jack tells me they won their match, Polly!"

"Did they?"

"But it's left him with a groggy shoulder. I doubt if he should have ridden all this way."

Polly came to life at this remark from Betty. She was gone from the study in a flash, although her flying up the corridor was very different from her usual boisterousness. Betty, in the study, turned to Paula, who sighed hard.

"It's dreadful, Betty dear. That Polly, of all geals, should be so quiet, so depressed! What-ehav is to be done, Betty?"

"There's only one thing to be done, Paula, as you know. Sooner or later we must manage to clear Effie Barnard, so that she will be welcomed back to her job in the school. Polly understands, right enough; it's a case of going slow, and going cautiously."

"Yes, wather! I realise, of course, that we must use the greatest care in dealing with this tewwible business."

"At present, Vanessa Ducrane is going about without the faintest idea that we have as good as traced the theft to her."

"And it's all to the good, Paula, that she doesn't know," Betty added. "As for Polly, I'm hoping it will take some of the weight off her mind, when she's been able to get a talk with Effie Barnard, in Barncombe. But now, let's go down and join them all for tea."

Their chums were all seated round the long table when Betty and Paula joined the gathering. Judging only by the amount of light talk and laughter, it was a typically happy Morcove—Grangemoor reunion. But Betty could tell what an unusual amount of forced levity there was.

Polly was making creditable attempts to be something better than a wet blanket. But now and then her spirits went "phut," and she was more inclined to frown than laugh when her adoring brother tried his hardest to keep her from thinking—thinking—

He could keep all the others on the smile with his amusing patter; but there were these moments when his own sister, sitting next to him, was glumly silent.

Suddenly Polly got up.

"You others are going to excuse me and Jack," she said. "We shall be back—oh, in good time!"

No one spoke. Jack promptly rose and followed his sister from the room.

"I'll do anything, Polly—" he began, the moment they were alone.

"I know you will, Jack. And so I want you to come with me into Barncombe. It has suddenly flashed upon me—there is just time, if we sprint a bit on our machines. But how about the shoulder?"

"That's nothing!"

"We'll be off, then. I'll get my things on," Polly said, and was back in less than a minute.

"It's like this, Jack. If Betty and the others come with me, then they'll have to share any upset, and I don't see why they should! I'm going into Barncombe, because—"

"Oh, I know why you're going, Polly-wolly," he nodded. "I've been told several things."

Not until they were out of doors did Polly speak again. Then:

"I have to make a call at Number Eight, Tan-ners Lane," she said as soon as she had got her cycle and they were off together. "That's where Effie Barnard lives."

But, most fatefully, brother and sister were to

be saved the trouble of going to Effie's humble home in the old Devon town.

Twenty minutes after the start from Morecove, they were making for Tanners Lane on foot, having parked their machines in the bakelouse-yard adjoining the Creamery. And, just as they were going to turn out of the quiet High Street, Polly saw Effie Barnard coming along the same pavement.

"Oh, Jack, there she is!"

It was a rather subdued murmur, and no wonder.

So unhappy looked the girl, who was going back to her home now; the girl who had been sacked from Morecove School—"and all through me!" as Polly had been thinking ever since.

Doing Her Best!

AFTER one moment of painful hesitation, Polly stepped briskly to meet Effie Barnard, catching her at the corner of Tanners Lane.

"Effie! Er—first of all, this is my brother." Jack doffed his school cap to the work-girl, who was acknowledging his presence by a shy glance.

"We were going to call at your home, Effie—at least, I was," Polly blurted out. "That other time I called—you know, I couldn't get a word with you."

"No, miss. It was a pity you did call, I think, although I feel sure you meant well. You were wanting to say that you—and your chums sort of left sorry for me. But—"

"Effie, it wasn't that altogether," Polly rushed on. "We were all longing to let you know that we had decided you were not the one, after all, who—"

"Oh, thank you very much, miss," came with a half-sad, half-bitter smile. "Only, not much comfort to me in that, is there, whilst the rest of your school—the headmistress and all—still considers me a thief!"

Jack anxiously watched for the effect of these words upon his sister. He was not surprised to see her wince.

"I know, Effie," Polly said distressfully. "But here's what I want to tell you, if it can be some comfort. Worse luck, although we feel sure now that it was some other girl, we can't prove it. It wouldn't help you—to accuse the other girl. She could so easily deny it and get her word believed. But, Effie—perhaps, in time—"

"Oh, in time, perhaps!" the sacked girl exclaimed, smiling faintly again and yet so pathetically. "I may even get some other situation—in time. I've been after one this afternoon, though, and it wasn't any use."

"Where—where?" Polly jerked eagerly. "I wish you would tell me, Effie—oh, do! If it was somewhere in this town—"

"I don't mind your knowing. It was a house called the Yews—on the new estate where they're building. Mrs. Jessel is the name. She asked me if I had been out before, and so—I had to tell her—"

Polly's eyes seemed to be brimming as she turned to Jack. He nodded, and it was a nod that meant much to her. It told her that he knew what was suddenly in her mind, and he thought it a good idea.

Then she gazed at Effie again, who seemed only to want to hurry upon her way home.

"Listen, Effie. My chums and I are not going to rest until we have righted you. And we—we have decided, too, how we must go about it all. It's Betty Barton's plan, and my brother here would tell you how wise Betty is. Anything she suggests, you can be sure it's the best thing possible."

"All right, miss, you can't say fairer than that." "Oh, if it is going to take a time to carry out the plan, then—Effie—"

But Effie was already walking away, and Polly watched her go miserably.

"You come away now with me, Polly," Jack counselled. "The girl's all right; she's not bearing you any ill will—"

"Oh, no, it is only her sister Kate who is doing that," Polly let out. "Kate Barnard is a very different sort from Effie. But there, I know what can be done now, anyhow. Jack, I'm going along to Mrs. Jessel, at the Yews, to put in a word for Effie."

"It's the best thing to do," he agreed heartily. "Won't take us more than a few minutes, either."



Stealthily Kate Barnard drew Jack Linton's cap from his pocket. Now she could put her plan into execution—a plan which would enable her to strike at Polly Linton by causing harm to Jack.

They knew the estate which was being developed on the outskirts of Barncombe. It could be reached, by brisk walking, in five minutes, so they did not trouble to reclaim their machines.

The Yews proved to be one of the finest of the new houses, standing in its new-made garden of a couple of acres. A very smart parlourmaid admitted them. Jack preferred to remain in the hall, while Polly was conducted into a richly furnished drawing-room.

There was somebody in the house to whom Mrs. Jessel was calling out: "Doris dear!" adding some light remark as she came towards the drawing-room door. Polly heard an answering: "Right-ho, mumsie!" from upstairs—a very casual voice it was—and then she had the lady confronting her.

"Yes, what is it?"

Mrs. Jessel was very expensively dressed, a good deal made-up, and inclined to be haughty. Polly took an immediate dislike to her.

"Please, Mrs. Jessel, I have come about a girl named Effie Bernard."

"Oh, yes?"

"I fancy she has had to tell you that she started in a job at my school, but got sacked—"

"Summarily dismissed, I gathered!"

"Er—yes. Mind you, the headmistress was not to blame. The case seemed to be proved against Effie up to the hilt. But since then I and some other girls have become quite sure that Effie, after all, did not take the money from our study. So I—I have come here to ask you," Polly faltered on, "if perhaps you can't engage Effie—"

"When she is under such a cloud as that!"

"But there is my word for it, Mrs. Jessel—"

"Just a moment. Have you said anything to your headmistress as to this new belief of yours about the girl being innocent?"

"No, Mrs. Jessel. You see—it's difficult to explain, but it wouldn't be a bit of use, as it is only what some of us now think, not a case of being able to prove it. But we are—positive."

"In other words, you are expecting me to do what you would never expect your own headmistress to do! Act on what you girls simply think!"

"Miss Somerfield is kind," Polly hastened to declare. "She'd certainly want to have Effie back, even if it simply meant sort of giving her the benefit of the doubt. But how could Effie return to her job at the school, even if she had the offer? She would not have been publicly cleared, as it were. But if you—if this job she has come after to-day—"

"No," Mrs. Jessel flatly stated, and rose to end the interview. "I couldn't dream! You must understand, I keep a nice place here! I could have done with some extra help for my servants; but—oh, no, quite out of the question!"

At this instant, some peals of girlish laughter sounded from upstairs. Polly inferred that Mrs. Jessel's daughter Doris had a friend with her, and that the two girls were going out. They were now coming away from one of the rooms upstairs.

"Sorry," drawled Mrs. Jessel. "There is nothing I can do."

"But—"

"I can find plenty of deserving cases, thank you, without wasting my pity in that quarter. Good-afternoon!"

A saddened look replaced Polly's beseeching one. Always a bad hand at taking a rebuff, she felt she despised, hated this imperious woman—one of the vulgar rich, she was sure!—for being so implacable. It was with her stamping step

that the headstrong Morcovian marched to the drawing-room door.

Then, as she strode out into the hall to rejoin Jack, surprise held her still.

Two girls had been coming downstairs, but when they saw Polly come out of the drawing-room confusion had seized them. One of the two was particularly flustered, even turning about quickly so that Polly, looking up the flight of stairs, would see only her back.

Yet, for a half-second at least, Polly had seen the face of that girl who had so quickly turned round, and somehow it was a face that seemed—familiar!

That was why Polly felt so spellbound with surprise.

Vaguely, the face had reminded her of someone at Morcove School—a scholar—and yet the girl's clothes were not Morcove clothes!

As for the other girl—the one who was coming first down the flight of stairs—she was obviously Doris Jessel, the daughter of the house. She had all the air of being in her own home; besides, she was a second edition of Mrs. Jessel.

Strange! Queer! That second girl—was she really someone whom Polly knew, and who did not want Polly to recognise her?

Then, suddenly, it flashed upon her—the clothes were not Morcove clothes. A Morcove scholar—a senior, by her age—changed out of Morcove clothes for some reason or other; that could account for the fear of being seen!

Polly had only to stand for a second or two, looking astounded, puzzled, for Doris Jessel to treat her to a resentful stare, from half-way up the flight. As for the other girl, she had gone back to the half-landing and was hanging about there—waiting for Polly and Jack to go.

Guessing as much, brother and sister marched to the hall door and let themselves out. As they closed the door they heard the two girls going off into fresh laughter.

"How did you get on, Polly?" Jack was asking.

"Oh—rotten! Mrs. Jessel was the last sort to do any good with! But, look here, Jack—something I can't quite make out!"

And she voiced her suspicion regarding the strange behaviour of the girl they had seen on the stairs.

A minute later Polly and Jack were in hiding together—amongst the rising walls of a house that was going up in the same new road.

They were waiting and watching to see those two girls, if the latter should go by.

Not for long, either, were Polly and Jack kept in suspense. Quite soon their watchful eyes beheld Doris Jessel and her friend, as they walked past, making for the centre of the town.

Then Jack heard his sister give an excited gasp. The one passer-by was as much a stranger to him as the other; but Polly—after a second sight of the girl who had previously seemed recognisable—Polly knew her now.

"Jack!" came the startled whisper. "Vanessa Ducrane!"

"— — —"
"Mine Enemy!"

AS that name was voiced by his sister, Jack turned to her with upraised brows.

"That girl, Polly—that senior?"

"Yes! Vanessa Ducrane—the very girl about whom we have got to be so careful, because she is so tricky, so slippery. She took the money that night at the school."

"She's a swanker, by the look of it, Polly," remarked Jack.

"She is that, Jack. This friend she has found in Doris Jessel—"

"They make a pair, I'd say. Does it mean that Vanessa Ducrane was tempted to steal the money to keep pace with a rich girl like the one who lives at the Yews?"

Polly received this with a nod.

"Since we were forced to believe that Vanessa took the money," she murmured, "we have been thinking of lots of things. Vanessa always has been one for showing off. And her people, it is known, are not really so well off. No disgrace in that, of course, so long as a girl doesn't try to make herself out to be grander than she is. But, Jack—would it be fair to follow them now?"

"Certainly!" Jack said promptly. "In view of what's already happened."

"I noticed," Jack's sister breathed, "she was carrying a small parcel. Is she going to the post office, to send it off? Anyway, let's get back into the town and follow them up."

Soon Polly and Jack had the two girls in view again. This was in the heart of the town, but not in the High Street.

Vanessa Ducrane and her friend Doris Jessel had dodged through narrow by-streets until they came to one where they paused before a shop, outside of which was the sign, "Antiques." Leaving Doris Jessel outside, Vanessa entered.

When she reappeared, she and her friend walked away quickly, and Polly and Jack knew they were going to lose sight of them again, round another corner. It couldn't be helped; but as soon as possible Polly and Jack hurried to get them in view again.

This further following-up took Polly and her brother past the antique shop. Neither he nor she had much taste for the kind of things usually displayed in dealers' windows; but as Vanessa had just visited the shop, Polly naturally gave it a side-glance as she and Jack went by.

Then she stopped dead and, gripping Jack's arm, pointed.

A fresh sensation! The proprietor, alone in his poky little shop, was placing a silver teapot on view in the window.

Polly walked her brother on again.

"Now I know!" she said, in greater excitement than ever. "Oh, I see it all! Why Vanessa borrowed things to wear that would save her from being known as a Morocco girl. She was not going to that shop to buy anything. She had to go there to try to sell a silver teapot."

"To raise money, eh? That, Polly, doesn't look as if she were—"

"But there is more in it than that, Jack! The teapot—it's the very one she bid up for at our rummage sale at the school! Pam gave it to the sale—a lovely thing, genuine Queen Anne, from Swanlake! Vanessa showed off over the bidding—wouldn't drop out. She got it for three-pounds-five."

"Then it was really hers to sell again, if she liked, Polly."

"Yes, but—just fancy, selling it! Miss Merrick wanted to get it, to keep. Miss Merrick made it clear, she would not think of selling it again. But Vanessa—she has cashed the thing straight away!"

"At a profit?"

"Most likely," was Polly's scornful response. "That's Vanessa's 'charity.' Even to pay for the teapot she had to steal the rest of the sale money in the night. I wonder how much the dealer gave her for it?"

"Soon find out. Here, you wait, Polly. We

needn't do any more tracking after those two girls."

Jack turned back, and Polly saw him go into the dealer's shop.

He was soon out again, and then Polly noticed that he was grinning.

"Rather funny, Polly-wolly. The dealer didn't buy the teapot after all. He offered to try and find a buyer for it, so Vanessa left it with him. And now—do you know, I reckon this may help you girls quite a lot."

Polly stared.

"How do you mean, Jack?"

"This is where you want it," he jested, tapping his forehead. "Betcher life, Polly, Vanessa is thinking of the teapot as being as good as sold, anyhow. From that, she'll get to spending as if she had already had the money. But the teapot may not sell—at this quiet time of year for Barncombe; no visitors. And so—"

"Oh, I get you, Jack!" his sister burst in upon him joyfully. "The money won't be coming in when she expected it! She'll be spent up—may even lay hands on other money, meaning to repay it when she does at last get some from the dealer—"

"And there, Polly—there is the chance, as I see it, for you and your chums! 'Once a thief, always a thief.'"

"Betty's very words!" Polly exclaimed in great excitement. "That's the very line Betty has said we must take! For Effie's sake we must get Vanessa over something else, and then force her to own up over the hospital money!"

"Listen, Jack. I'll get back to Morocco. You stay around in the town, keeping your eyes open for Vanessa and her friend. They have seen you with me, but I don't really think Vanessa will know who you are, even if she sees you—except that you're from Grangemoor."

"She needn't even know I'm that, if I pocket my school cap," he promptly rejoined. "But is there any sense in my still shadowing them?"

"Yes, Jack! Any information about Vanessa now may help us—what she gets up to in her free time; whether that friend of hers is leading her into extravagant ways. I would stay on in the town myself, but she might recognise me and suspect that I am—"

"You don't want to stay out, Polly. You get back, and then you can explain to my pals that I shall be riding from Barncombe direct to Grangemoor. Best of luck, Polly!"

And so they parted, Jack being a few minutes after his sister in returning to where they had parked their machines. They had not wanted to be seen together in the High Street.

Jack did not notice how someone watched him interestedly as he came wheeling his machine out of the bakehouse yard. But it was so.

Kate Barnard, sister of Effie—she had recognised him, only a minute since, as a schoolboy who had previously rejoined Polly in that by-street. His looks convinced Kate that this must be a brother of the schoolgirl against whom she had as good as sworn a vendetta. So, now, if only because he was Polly's brother, the revengeful girl kept her dark eyes upon him.

Two things caused her to fancy that he had some unusual purpose in view. He had pocketed his cap since she first saw him in that by-street. Also, he was not mounting his machine to ride away. His sister was gone from the town, as Kate Barnard knew, having seen Polly riding off in the direction of Barncombe. But this schoolboy brother—he was only wheeling his machine along the High Street.

Kate Barnard followed him. She had nothing better to do, being a girl who was out of work and not really trying to get a job. Polly's brother might be only wheeling the machine because, a few yards farther on, he had a shop to visit. But—why had he put away his school cap? The watchful girl could see a corner of it protruding from his jacket pocket.

And then, suddenly, she could tell that he was minded to enter the cinema. He was putting a question to the commissioner.

The man's reply, whatever it was, must have determined Polly's brother. He took his bicycle to the cinema's parking place, then returned to enter the building.

The attendant who conducted Jack to a seat in the darkened auditorium was next minute conducting another incomer to the same row.

It was Kate Barnard. Having come in almost on the heels of Jack Linton, she found it convenient to drop down into a vacant seat next to the one he had taken.

A sprinkling of patrons was enjoying the comic item of the programme, and soon she was aware of his watching and laughing along with the rest of the audience, and in the darkness she moved her hand cautiously until her fingers encountered a side pocket of his coat.

The folded-up cap was there, still projecting just a little. Unnoticed by Jack, she carefully drew it from the pocket and retained it—because he was Polly's brother, and the best revenge of all would be to strike at her through him!

Strange News From Grangemoor

"CAN'T make out why I don't hear from Jack! Here it is Wednesday morning, Betty—and still no letter from him!"

"I suppose he really had nothing to report about your visit to the town, last Saturday. And so, being a bit rushed, he hasn't troubled to write."

"Then he should have troubled—dropped me a line, one way or the other!"

Betty smiled. It always amused her to hear Polly getting into a fume about Jack, as if he were one mass of shortcomings.

She and Betty had come up to the study to get ready for morning class. At any moment Naomer was liable to dash in, with Paula, as it were, in tow.

"Judy had a letter from Dave this morning, I fancy."

"She did, Betty? Oh, where is Judy, then?" cried the madcap. "Jack sometimes sends a message for me through one of Dave's letters to Judy."

A few of her furious strides along the corridor, and the madcap was finding Judy all by herself in that study of which she was a co-tenant. Even as Polly burst in, her grave-natured chum was re-perusing a letter, standing over by the window to obtain a better light.

"That from Dave, Judy?"

"Er—yes, Polly—"

"I was wondering—whether Jack got your brother to put in any message for me? He sometimes does."

"Yes, dear, but he didn't this time," said quiet Judy, rather hastily folding the letter to put it away.

"Um! Bother Jack, then; that's what I say—" And there Polly broke off, detecting a very significant change of colour in Judy's cheeks. Judy, usually so calm, was now at least flustered, if not agitated.

"Judy, you are keeping something from me!" "Polly dear, keep calm. I suppose I would have had to let you know, but I was wanting to think how best I could—"

"Oh, never mind trying to spare me!" Polly stamped, then turned to address Betty, who had now entered. "Betty, there is something in Dave's letter to Judy here about Jack!"

"But nothing serious, I hope?"

"It is about last Saturday—"

"What!" Polly gasped. "Oh—"

"It seems that a charge has been made against Jack, at his school, of doing serious damage to one of the houses being built on the new estate in Barncombe. The head of the building firm turned up at Grangemoor School, with the watchman who patrols the property."

"The new estate!" Polly echoed. "That's—strange! Jack and I did hide in one of the half-finished houses last Saturday. But as for doing any damage—what rot!"

"I think, Polly," Judy resumed, "Jack must have gone back to that part of the town after you had left him. At any rate, damage was done, and it was traced to Jack because they found his cap just there."

"Found—his—cap?"

Polly drew in a quick breath, for she had just remembered something.

"When I left Jack, he was going to be about without his cap," she said excitedly. "But I don't understand! I only know that he may have gone back to those half-built houses, as they're in the same road as the Yews. What's Jack's punishment? Tell me!"

"They—he— A gating is part of the punishment—"

"Gated! So he can't come over here to see me! Can't go out with Dave and the others at any time? And the rest, Judy?"

"Nothing, yet—"

"But there is to be something, on top of the gating? Well?"

"Oh, I hate to say it," Judy exclaimed distressfully, "but Jack is to be caned, in front of the whole school. To—make an example of him."

Judy's statement resulted in a dramatic stillness. Polly's feelings were now beyond vocal expression.

"Can anything be done?" Betty questioned at last, wearing a hard-thinking look. "Can we—"

"I can! And I will!" Polly suddenly exploded.

"I must go over to Grangemoor, after all; that's the only thing. I'll see the headmaster myself—I will! He shan't cane Jack. He shan't even keep him gated. You quite understand," she said with grim finality, "I am going over to Grangemoor to-day. Judy, when is the caning to be—did Dave say?"

"Round about six this evening."

"Right! Then it will do if I start away after dinner. It's a halfer. I can be there by three."

"I am not going to say anything about your being down to play for the team, Polly—"

"You had better not, Betty! My brother must come before the Form, even! But don't, any of you, start thinking about coming with me—"

"You can't go alone, Polly—"

"What!"

"Of course you can't!" insisted that chum who had been captain until she decided that it was high time another girl should "take an innings." She was so insistent that finally Polly had to agree to Pam Willoughby being her companion.

By break, that morning, everything had been fixed up—beautifully! The two girls were even to go there and back by car!

Pam had simply had to get permission to ring up her home at Swanlake, which was only a mile or two from Grangemoor, and a Swanlake car had been as good as ordered.

Pam's parents were away, on one of those frequent visits to Town which their position in high Society so often necessitated. So Pam spoke to the Swanlake housekeeper, who said that Geofreys, the chauffeur, would be over at Morcove School at two o'clock, to pick them up.

Once Polly was in the car with Pam, she experienced a certain grim delight. She felt that her turning up in state, as it were, would help her to "show that Head!"

As for Pam, she was serenely prepared for a



As Polly rejoined her brother in the hall, two girls commenced to descend the stairs. Suddenly they paused and one turned in evident confusion. Polly gasped. Surely that was a Morcove girl, but why wasn't she in school uniform?

most trying 'time. She hated "scenes." Yet scenes there were going to be.

How could there fail to be more than a stir, when it was Polly, of all girls, who would presently be demanding to see Grangemoor's headmaster!

— — —
She Won't Take "No!"

"GOAL!" It was a hearty roar of voices for Polly and Pam to hear, as the car turned in at the main entrance to famous Grangemoor shortly after half-past two.

A footer match was in full swing; but as they looked out of the car windows they could tell that it was a team of seniors, playing some equally well-grown visitors.

That field on which Jack's House—Challenor's

—was accustomed to play its games was practically deserted. Two youngsters—one with his arm in a sling—were sauntering over the grass, looking very bored.

"Crooks, both of them," Pam shrewdly deduced. "Unable to go wherever the rest of Challenor's has gone, this afternoon—for I don't see anyone else!"

"No; where is everybody?" Polly fretted, her frowning eyes close to the unbreakable glass. "Some important away match, I suppose."

There was the same lifelessness when the car pulled up at the entrance to that grey-walled, ivy-clad building which was Challenor's. No joyous batches of pals were dashing in and out. Polly's stabbing a finger against the bell-screen caused a ring-ring! to break quite a solemn stillness.

"Gosh, Pam—if Jack has gone with the rest! He may have done so!" Polly muttered dismally. "The gating order might be taken off if he were down to play in an away match, and Mr. Challenor going with them all. I didn't think of that!"

"Yes, well—"

"Oh, but it won't matter so much! I'm only seeing Jack—before I see the Head!"

A parlourmaid came to the stout oak door in the ancient Gothic porch.

"Afternoon!" Polly said. "I have a brother in this House—"



"Oh, yes. I think I remember you, miss. Master Linton's sister, of Morcove? But—"

"Is he about?"

"As it happens, he is, miss. But Mr. Challenor has gone with nearly all the boys to Exeter, for a big match, and Mrs. Challenor, too, is—"

"It doesn't matter! Here, you can let me see my own brother, surely! I'll make it all right for you," Polly blandly promised. "Is he upstairs, then?"

"I would much prefer, miss, if you would first get permission—"

"Oh, if it's like that! I must go to the Head first, must I? I was going to see him, in any case, and so—"

"You won't find the headmaster at his House—"

"What!"

"He's out, I know; won't be back until after five."

Polly turned to Pam with a grimace.

"Do you hear this, Pam? After five—and the caning is at six!"

"I'm awfully sorry, miss. I did hear something about it all. Come back presently, and I may have been able to make it all right. I shall have to find someone."

And the door closed—that massive old door—and there was Polly, looking as if she wished she had a battering-ram!

"Hallo, Jimmy!"

Polly's fierce eyes came away from the door. Pam had spoken, serene as ever, but with that special cordiality which she reserved for her favourite member of the Grangemoor chummary.

Flashing round, Polly was aware of shy Jimmy Cherril, in such a state of surprise that he was nearly dropping some recent purchases from the school tuck-shop.

Bananas, chocolate, a tin of sardines, and some dough-nuts, were all in one bag, which a hugging arm was almost letting slip. He stammered:

"Oh—er—er—you've come over, have you? Er—"

"Jimmy!" the volcanic Morcovian began at him. "Where's Jack, then? Quick! Is he indoors, then, or what?"

"Oh, yes, he's—he's in the study, in fact. He didn't go with the rest, to Exeter. So—er—I thought I wouldn't go, either," Jimmy sheepishly imparted. "Dave was in the team, and Tom; and Tubby—he's gone, to get a few things whilst there was the chance. Fine shops in Exeter."

"Not that the tuck-shop is so bad?" Pam remarked, causing Jimmy to bash down some bananas that were sticking out of the bulging bag. "You and Jack, I take it—"

"I wanted Jack to have a rather special tea, presently," Jimmy's delightful simplicity made him say. "As it is a bit rotten for him at present."

"A bit!" Polly echoed.

"If you like," Jimmy added, "I could get him to come down to take a walk round the grounds with you?"

"I would much prefer to see him in his study," Polly responded. "Pam and I will go up with you."

Jimmy was not the one to demur to this strong-willed decision. He turned the outer knob of the door and stood aside for Pam and Polly to pass in before him.

Polly marched in! Pam followed, bestowing that smile upon Jimmy which he always found so dazzling.

Upstairs, Polly so far restrained her impetuosity as to let Jimmy take precedence and go first into the study. The two girls heard him say some announcing words, and heard a bearish: "What!" from Jack.

As his sister and Pam entered, Jack glared his annoyance.

"Polly! Now, what on earth do you want!"

"Some tea, Jack—but there's no hurry about that. I've come over to—"

"You had far better have stayed at Morcove, minding your own business!"

"It is my business," she sweetly responded, not at all misconstruing his crusty mood. It was to his credit that he regretted her coming. "Pam only came as an excuse for using the Swanlake car."

"Gosh, you mean to say you—"
"Yes, the car is outside; no biking. So we can stay all the longer. In fact, until the Head comes in!"

"Polly—"

"Jack, I'm not going to allow you to be caned. I am going to see the Head in time to get him to understand; there must have been a mistake, and, anyway, it was my fault, last Saturday—"

"But it wasn't your fault, Polly! I blame myself for having lost my cap somewhere in the town. I took it off and shoved it in my pocket. It must have worked out and fallen to the ground—when I was hiding again amongst those houses that are being run up."

"Why were you hiding there again, Jack?"

"Because I was still shadowing Vanessa Ducrane and that Jessel girl. They went into a cinema shortly after you and I parted. So I went in, too. When they came out, I did the same. They walked back to the Yews, on the new estate, and I thought it just as well to hide again in one of the half-built houses. I thought you would like to know how long Vanessa stayed on at the Yews. As a matter of fact, she had not come away when at last, I simply had to beat it. Then I missed my cap."

"You didn't, of course, do any damage to the building?"

"Not a bit! I've told the Head, I can swear I didn't! I had to admit being there, though, and what with that and my cap being found by the night watchman—well, I'm for it, that's all."

"But what did the Head say?"

"'Bosh!' That's what he said! So I tell you," Jack cried, rumping his hair, "you had much better go away, Polly! Pam, take her off now, do! I'm sure Swanlake can give you a nice tea—"

"So can you!" Polly retorted. "After all Jimmy's shopping."

"Anyway, you have no right to be here, Polly!"

"Well, I am going to stop! If Pam would like to run to Swanlake in the car, and return later—"

"Oh, no," Pam smiled. "Jimmy can talk to me whilst you and Jack go on sparring. Mrs. Greddon, at Swanlake, won't be uneasy. She knows Geoffreys will look after us."

"So perhaps," Polly rejoined, entirely pleased with her chum's remarks, "you two boys would like us to get tea for you? Then, for once, you will have a proper cup."

"Bother you, Polly!" Jack helplessly raged. "Don't laugh, all of you! Jimmy, you tell Pam she's got to go! Isn't it against all the rules, Jimmy?"

That chum nodded, grinning.

"Yes, well," said Pam, "Polly is only doing what any girl should do for her brother, in the same cires. If I had a brother—"

"I wish Jimmy had you for a brother," Jack sighed. "Then he would know what it is like to have—a sister! All right, stay, the pair of you! But—"

"Mrs. Challenor was our Form-mistress at Morcove, before she married your Housemaster," Polly blandly observed. "She isn't about, or she would make it all right. Pam and I trust her to make it all right, when she does come in. Where do you boys keep your tea-cloth and so on?"

"Cloth? We don't have a cloth," Jack said. "We just—well, put the things out!"

"Do you hear this, Pam? Really, they need looking after! Where are the things, anyhow, that you just 'put out'?"

Jimmy crossed over to open a cupboard door.

He did this with a beseeching look for Pam only; a look imploring her to keep away! Polly, he realised, had got to see the inside of that cupboard. Polly did so, and was instantly seized with housewifely horror.

"How positively awful; how absolutely disgracefully untidy!" she commented. "We will make it an early tea, so as to put everything away nicely afterwards. Another thing, you two boys; as Pam and I have the car, we might run to Barncombe after the early tea—"

"Do what?" Jack stared. "Run to Barncombe, to see Kate Barnard, and then be back in good time for the Head! I want to catch Kate Barnard if I can," Polly said, already fetching things from the cupboard to the table. "Don't you think that would be a good idea, Pam?"

"Anything you wish, dear!" "I'm surprised, Pam," Jack gasped, "at your letting Polly have her own way like this! But you're all against me! Jimmy, you're as bad!"

"Why weren't you taken to Exeter with the rest, Jack?" his sister asked. "Surely Mr. Challenger hasn't been adding to the punishment?"

"No. But I wasn't in the team, and so the Head butted in to say that I must stay back."

"Old Tony was a bit sick at having to act on that as an order," Jimmy interposed.

"The Head will be a bit sick," Polly grimly predicted, "before I've done with him!"

Meantime, she and Pam, with Jimmy flusteredly helping them to find things, got the table laid for tea. Jack would do nothing, as a standing protest against the girls' presence, though at heart, of course, he was admiring both Polly and Pam for wanting to help.

At last the tea was brewed, Jimmy having fetched the boiling water. Polly, having obtained her own way, was in the sweetest of moods whilst presiding over this tea-party of four—the only one that would be held, this afternoon, in Challenger's House.

They had merely to lapse into silence for a moment or so, to be aware of a rare silence everywhere in the usually noisy schoolhouse.

"Is your tea as you like it, Jimmy?"

"Fine, thanks, Polly! Quite a treat!"

"And yours, Jack?"

"Whe'? Huh, not so bad!"

And after a pause:

"What good do you think you're going to do, Polly, coming back later on?"

"We won't talk about it," was the sweet response.

"Gurr!" Jack emitted, and drank tea furiously.

But presently his pride in Polly supervened, and he left off growling. Their sitting at tea together, as a nice little foursome, practically with the



"So you're here again, are you, Polly Linton? What for? Just to say you're sorry all over again?" The fierce hostility in Kate Barnard's voice made Polly wince. She knew now that, in this girl, she had an implacable enemy.

whole schoolhouse to themselves—it appealed to his keen sense of humour.

He became the hearty host, urging both girls to make a good tea. He called his pal "Sir Jimmy"—a sure sign that he, Jack, was in high spirits again. The coming caning was something to treat as a great joke, Polly and Pam being asked to visualise the "Old Man" as only pretending to strike hard.

Finally, Jack carried with him a cup of tea and a cake or so when he and Jimmy went downstairs to see the two girls off. Even Chauffeur Geoffreys, as stately as the establishment to which he belonged, was moved to smiles as he received the welcome cup at the hands of a very jovial Jack. "What's that you have been saying to Geoffreys?" Polly spoke out to Jack, a minute later, from the car. "Not that it matters. Geoffreys takes his orders from us, not you! 'Bye, for now!"

She blew her brother a kiss. He saluted, his eyes saying: "You rogue, Polly!" Pam bestowed a last smile upon Jimmy, who turned red as if he felt that he should not have been caught gazing at her.

Then the car glided away—to be back by a little after five, at the latest!

The last Polly and Pam saw of the two boys, the latter were finding themselves confronted by a most astonished parlourmaid, in the porch of Challenger's.

The parlourmaid seemed to be demanding explanations; and Jack—he seemed to be quite capable of offering them, with an engaging plausibility.

In the car, as it did its swift run to Barncombe, both girls sat silent, retaining faint smiles for most of the journey. It had been a very happy interlude—their hour or so with Jack and Jimmy.

Then, in Barncombe, came the turning aside into Tanners Lane. The grand Roysler car, pulling up outside the door of Number Eight—that humble home to which loss of work and shame had come.

"And all through me!"

Still that grieving thought was haunting Polly's mind, and if she had been smiling when she began this journey with Pam, she was looking heavy-hearted now, at the journey's end!

Out For Revenge

KATE BARNARD, turning into Tanners Lane after idling about the town, was surprised to see a grand car waiting outside Number Eight.

She brisked up her step, eager to find out whose car it was. Not the doctor's, for she knew his by sight; besides, there was nobody ailing at home. Who, then, was the visitor?

So Chauffeur Geoffreys, passing the time with a newspaper as he sat at the wheel, came in for a sudden nervous inquiry:

"Er—have you brought someone to see mother?"

"I've brought two young ladies from Morcove School, miss—I don't know why. It isn't my business."

"Oh, I see! Er—"

"One of them is my master's daughter, Miss Pamela Willoughby. The other, miss, is, I fancy, a Miss Polly Linton."

"Oh! THAT girl!" said Kate sourly. "Right,

I'll go in! So they have to have cars, do they, to do their bits of—charity?"

"They had this car, my girl," Geoffreys impassively answered, "because they had first to go to Grangemoor School."

"Indeed!" And spiteful Kate laughed. "So Polly Linton has heard about her brother, has she? Oh, of course, you wouldn't understand," she sneered at the dignified chauffeur. "But—mind telling me? Are they going back to Grangemoor from here?"

"That, I understand, is the intention."

"Thanks so much! I was only wondering!"

Then Kate took out the latchkey and fitted it into the street-door keyhole. Since father died, she had taken possession of the spare latchkey.

Slam! she heeled shut the door, after entering, and then went along the narrow passage into a kitchen that was crowded for its size.

Her mother was there, standing at the table to do some ironing. Effie, Polly and Pam were seated.

"Huh!" Kate began, as she came striding upon the quiet scene. "So you're here again, are you, Polly Linton? What for? Just to say you're sorry, all over again?"

"Now, now, Kate dear," interposed the mother, whilst she thumped away with the hot iron, "don't start, Kate, there's a good girl. We've had no unkind words so far, and we don't want none, I'm sure."

"You don't—oh, no, of course you don't, mother!" the graceless daughter sneered. "Never mind that Effie's out of a job, when she might have been in one if it hadn't been for—"

"What's done is done, Kate, and hard words won't mend matters. Besides, Miss Polly has been—"

"Miss Polly"! And she must come in a car, too—pah! But how would you like to be one of us?" Kate suddenly flared out at Polly. "How'd you like it if you belonged to a poor home, and father dead, and—"

"Kate, don't!" her sister Effie entreated. "Can't you see how sorry the young lady is? If a chance does turn up to right the wrong—"

"If"! A fine big "if" that is, I'm sure!"

"Well, there," Mrs. Barnard pleaded, going to the stove to change her iron, "that's enough, Kate. You'll only be sorry yourself, some day—so unforgetting! When I've done my best to teach you, I'm sure I have, that we must bear and forbear in this world. I can't have the young ladies upset. They—they are meaning it kindly—"

"Oh, all right, then, and so let 'em stay and welcome! As for me, I can always go out again," Kate seethed, turning back into the passage. "Home, Sweet Home"! She laughed ironically. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Kate dear—"

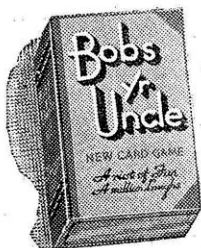
But she was deaf to her mother's beseeching cry. The savagery in her looks as she tugged back the street-door latch became greater when the opening door let her see the fine car once more.

Then, in the moment it took her to pull the street door shut behind her, she was able to put on a calm, even amiable, expression.

"Here, a message for you," she smiled, after crossing the pavement to speak to the Swanlake chauffeur. "The young ladies have asked me to tell you they won't want you any more! They say you can go straight home now, at once—see?"

"But they talked of—"

"Yes, and now they've changed their minds,



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that's all! They want to stay on for a bit, with mother, and so they think they ought to go straight back to their own school afterwards."

Geoffreys, nodding his complete understanding, put away the newspaper and touched the electric starter. He was not at all surprised at the order sent out to him—as he supposed it had been sent out. He could imagine the two girls feeling they had done enough tearing about for one afternoon. He let in the clutch.

"Good-day, miss!" he said civilly, without looking her way.

"Oh, good-day, mister! That's right," she chuckled to herself as the car sped away; "Home, John!" And now to wait and see that Linton girl's face when I tell her—another bit of my revenge!"

"GOODNESS, Pam! Where's the car?"

Polly, coming out with her cium by the front door of the Barnards' lowly home, had no sooner spoken than she saw Kate Barnard.

"The car, your ladyship," spiteful Kate said mockingly, "has gone, and won't be coming back!"

"Gone? But why?"

"Because I sent it away, see? And if you want to know why I did that, I don't mind telling you!"

The speaker strode closer to the two schoolgirls.

"Didn't I say I would pay you out for getting our Effie the sack?" Kate hissed at Polly. "The car's gone, and now—ask yourself how you are going to get to Grangemoor School to plead for that brother of yours! I know what the idea was; guessed! There's not much I don't know, my girl!"

"You—you wretch! Oh——"

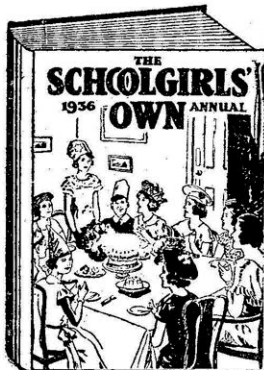
"Wretch, yourself!" Kate fiercely retorted. "Didn't you get my sister the sack, so that she's out of work now and her character gone? Then why shouldn't I hit back at you, through your brother? As I have done—I don't mind admitting it!"

Pam, keeping calm, plucked Polly by the sleeve to go away with her; but Polly would not move. Her eyes, as they stared at Kate's fierce face, expressed a growing horror.

"The time now, Polly Linton—nearly five, isn't it? And your brother is to be caned at six! I know, for I know the watchman on those works who went over to Grangemoor School with his boss! I know all about the row your brother is in, and what his headmaster said he would do to him! Nearly five, and you've no car, and Grangemoor miles from here! You'd like to do something for your brother, and it can't be done, my girl—thanks to me, ha, ha, ha!"

Ending with that gloating laugh, the revengeful

(Continued on the next page.)



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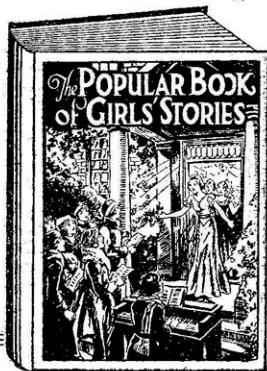
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girl turned and then walked flauntingly away. Again Pam took her chum by the arm; but it was not until half a minute later, when Kate Barnard had gone from sight, that Polly could be got to move or speak.

"We're done!" she ejaculated. "We can't get back to Grangemoor in time! Hark!"

Even then the town hall bells were beating out five o'clock.

"I've no money on me," Pam said, "or we might hire a car."

"Telephone?" Polly jerked. "I might ring up the Head. Oh, how can I ever explain everything over the phone. But for what it is worth—I'll try that, Pam! Come on!"

They hurried away, making for the Central Post Office, in High Street.

Ten minutes later Polly came back to Pam, who had waited outside the post office. Polly's face, meant for laughter, was gloom itself.

"He rang off, Pam. As soon as he knew who was speaking from this end, he banged down the receiver. So that," Polly said huskily, "is that! And nothing else to be done—nothing, now! Except, go home to Morcove—"

They set off at once upon the four-mile drag back to their school. A wearisome trudge, even for a pair of girls who were so fit and strong. But if Polly's step dragged, it was only because of the weight upon heart and mind alike.

They heard the town hall bells again, striking half-past five. Then, in due time, they heard Morcove's own chimes, sounding the three-quarters. Not a word could Pam get from Polly.

Six o'clock, at this time of year, was the hour for all scholars to be indoors. And the school chimes ding-dong'd again just as Polly and Pam went in by the schoolhouse porch.

Whilst the bells were still chiming, Polly stood mute and still in the front hall, with only Pam to see her suffering look. The cheerless twilight had caused an early flocking indoors. Down from all the study quarters above stairs came the old familiar and pleasant murmur of voices and the occasional bang of a door.

The last stroke of the iron-tongued bell vibrated upon the still outer air. Six o'clock!

Polly went, then, with Pam, to discard outdoor things in the cloak-room. Finally, they mounted to the Form quarters and passed down the long

corridor to Study 12. And now there were voices as dear as they were familiar which the two girls heard.

Polly threw open the study door, and the cheery spirit of the chummers rushed at her and Pam.

"Back, then!" was Betty's gladsome cry. "Tired, girls? You look it! But—"

"Heah's a cheah, yes, wather! Bai Jove—"

"Bekas, queek, Polly! Bes eet all right for Jack? Have you got him off? Eef so—hooray!"

That jubilant cry of Naomer's—it ended a general volley of welcoming remarks. Madge and others who had not yet spoken could not speak now. There was that in Polly's face which proclaimed this was no time for rejoicing.

So, for a second or two, there was complete stillness in the study.

"Why, then," Betty whispered, "what does it mean, Polly?"

"They are caning him! We couldn't do anything!" Polly said tensely. "And it's all my fault! You girls don't understand, but I will explain presently, or Pam will. It's all because I did Effie Barnard that injury—"

Never had Polly's chums seen her as depressed as this, and they listened attentively while Pam explained.

"How that Kate Barnard must-hate me!" she said at last. "She must have known that Pam and I were only there to do the best to make up to Effie; and yet she had to have—her revenge!"

"The girl will be sorry some day," Pam murmured. "Her own mother told her so."

At that, Polly's eyes flashed in the old fiery way.

"Yes, and perhaps the mother was right," she said tensely. "It's true I did wrong Effie. But I am going to right her in the end; I won't rest until I've done so! And then—when Effie is back in the very job from which she got the sack—then, girls, perhaps her sister will be sorry—"

Betty nodded, looking greatly moved. "That's the way to talk, Polly. With us to help you, Effie shall be righted! So now to get to grips with Vanessa Ducrane; show her up for what she really is!"

[END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.]

Cunning as Well as Clever!

That's Vanessa Ducrane, the senior Betty Barton and Co. must deal with if they are to put matters right for Effie Barnard. Be sure to read how they carry out their difficult task in next Tuesday's enthralling complete Morcove story:—

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