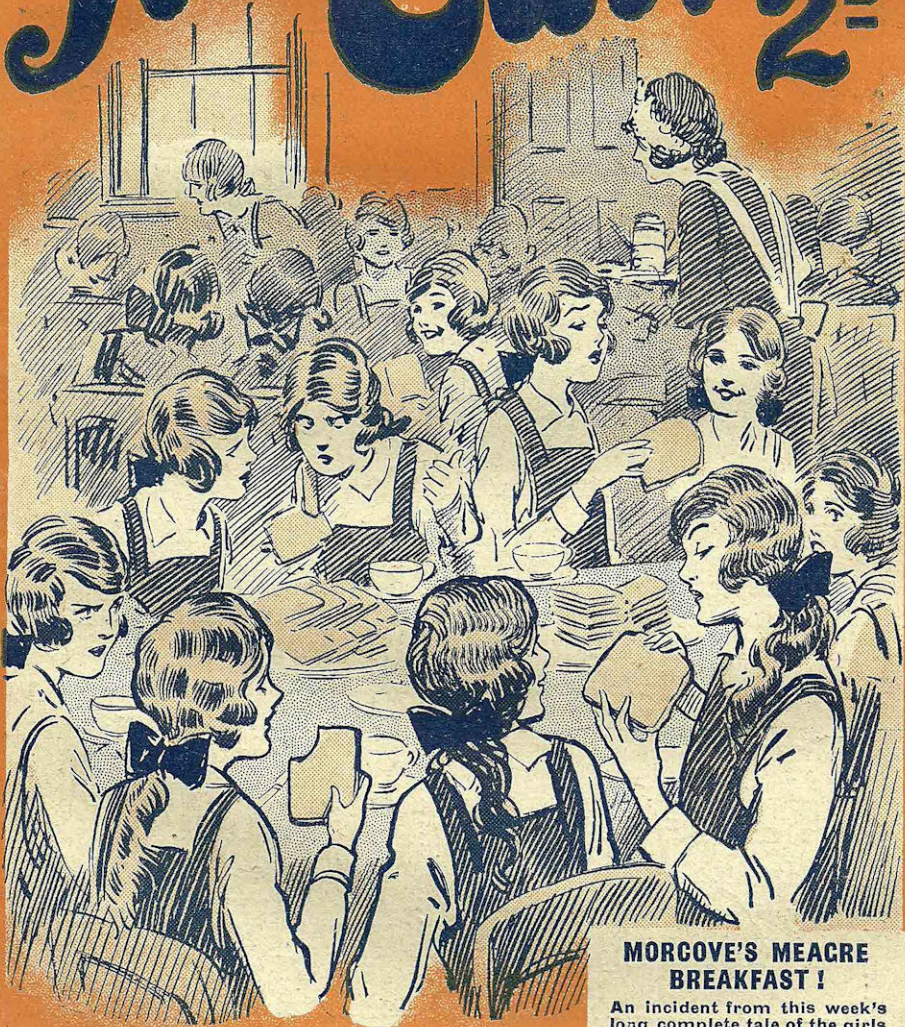


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The Schoolgirls' Own 2^d



MORCOVE'S MEAGRE BREAKFAST!

An incident from this week's
long complete tale of the girls
of Morcove School.

A Splendid Long Complete Tale of the Morcove Girls in their New Surroundings.



WHEN THE SCHOOL STOOD AT BAY!

By MARJORIE STANTON.

Cora Grandways, the traitress within the school, does all in her power to undermine the other girls' sympathies for Miss Somerfield. Will she succeed? Or will Betty Barton & Co. show her up in her true colours?

Never Mind the Mud.

"O H, deah; oh, deah! Oh, my gwacious, geals!"

"Now what's the trouble, Paula, darling?"

"Twouble, bai Jove!"

Paula Creel could say no more than that for the moment. She sank back in her easy-chair in the makeshift study at Sawnton House, and looked down very dolefully at her shoes and stockings.

Polly Linton gave her a teasing grin.

"You are slightly muddy, Paula!"

"Muddy, bai Jove! Weally, geals, I see nothing for it but to swap these shoes and stockings," elegant Paula said at last. "No one will ever get them wight again. It is what comes of playing hockey in a ploughed field, bai Jove!"

Then all the girls who were crowding out the roomy study laughed together.

"Don't exaggerate, Paula!" chuckled Polly. "It was not a ploughed field, only a very rough one."

"Weal, it's ploughed up wight enough now," groaned Paula. "We did the ploughing. My gwacious, haow the mud did stick!"

"A good game, anyhow!" laughed Betty Barton, whilst she licked a stamp and thumped it on to some letter just sealed up. "I quite enjoyed it."

"Ooo, yes, oet was jolly!" exclaimed Morcove's dusky one, Naomer Nakara, at the same time skirmishing across the room to bear down upon Paula. "Cheer up, you doleful duffer! He, he, he! That is the new name for our Paula, girls. Ze doleful duffer!"

"Now, I don't want any of your teasing, Naomer!" Paula warned her Serene Highness, the girl queen of Nakara. "I am in that state at present—Ow, dwop it, Na—ow—mer!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Get off me!" howled the would-be elegant, suddenly finding Naomer dumped upon her lap. "You're as muddy as I am, Naomer! Healp! I'll wun away! I'll never come back! Pll—"

"Oh, coward!" Polly took a hand in the teasing. "Who was the girl who said, when we were turned out of Morcove School, that she would put up with anything here at Sawnton House?"

Half a dozen girlish voices answered lustily:

"Paula said it!"

"And who," continued Polly, in mock disgust, "is the girl who has been grumbling and grousing?"

"Paula!" went up the chorus again.

"No, geals; I pwotest—"

"Silence!" commanded Polly, with the voice of a policeman. "I put it to the meeting. Who is the girl who almost weeps when she is taken out for a game in the field?"

"Paula!"

This was too much for the elegant one. With unusual energy, she suddenly slid Naomer off her lap on to the floor, and stood up.

"It is untwue!" she protested virtuously.

"Gwumble—me? Whoever heard me gwumble?"

"Oho!" from Polly.

"If a geal cannot expwess wegwet—merely a wowd of wegwet—at the amount of mud she has brought into the house," Paula went on loftily, "then I'd better never open my mouth again, that's all!"

"There, there, poor dear, did they tease her?" mocked Polly, stroking the elegant one's pretty shoulders. "Cheer up, Paula, darling! I'm on your side. I won't let them tease you. It's quite true; you do not grumble. You only complain from morning to night!"

"You're a fine one to talk about teasing!" groaned Paula. "One of the worst!"

"Cruel of you to say so!" And Polly pretended to cry. "Boo-hoo! Paula says I tease her. I'll run away! I'll never come back! Pll—"

"Dwop it!" Paula fairly howled, as she heard her own lamentation imitated by the madcap of the Form. "Geals, isn't it about time to go down to dinner? I'm hungwy—yes, wather!"

"Grumbling again!" commented Polly. "Grand-

ness, though, it is nearly one o'clock, and we must tidy ourselves before the gong goes! How the morning has flown!"

"How the days are flying, too!" came very quietly and sadly from Madge Minden, as she stepped to a tear-off calendar and removed yesterday's leaf. "One more day, girls, nearer to the time when Miss Somerfield means to leave us!"

"Yes!"

And for a moment after that there was a deep and sad silence in the study that held Betty and her chums.

They could never be reminded, during these troublous times through which the school was passing, of how their beloved headmistress's time was rapidly running out, without feeling a grief too deep for words.

"If only we girls could have induced her to stay on!" Betty exclaimed wistfully at last. "If only those resolutions which each Form in the school passed could have been the means of getting her to stay!"

"Yes, wather!" sighed Paula. "It is tewwible, geals, to realise that Miss Somerfield is going to make this twemendous sacwifice for the school's dear sake!"

"Yet, knowing her as we do, how can we be surprised that she has stood firmly by her brave resolve?" murmured Madge, her dark eyes ashine. "Ah, and those Lupina wretches, over at Morcove, they knew only too well the sort of woman they had to deal with!"

"Bother them," was Polly's furious outburst, "heartless creaturos that they are! Yes, they knew just how to strike their blow in revenge upon Miss Somerfield!"

"A revenge that has been nursed by Manuel Lupina for years and years," rejoined Helen Craig disgustedly. "Ah, well, perhaps it is the better way to deal with them, after all—for Miss Somerfield to let them see she will rather give in to their demand for her retirement than have the school smashed up!"

"But think what it means for her," deplored Tess feelingly, "to resign the post she has held so long, to turn her back upon us all!"

"She'll never have the heart to take another post anywhere else, I'm afraid!" exclaimed Dolly Delane. "Surely she must be feeling that it must be Morcove or—nothing!"

The gong sounded in the hall below, and at the first deep *bong!* all the grave talk had to cease, the girls jumping up to rush away and make themselves presentable after coming in from the makeshift hockey-field in such a state.

In a minute they were trooping downstairs together, making fun of the rumous state of this house in which as many as possible of the scholars had been accommodated.

Their own chummy mistress, Miss Redgrave, encountered them at the foot of the shabby staircase, and she must have thought they looked just as blithe as they used to do in the old days at Morcove itself, that great and grand range of schoolbuildings, of which they had been so cruelly dispossessed.

But, ah, there was a good deal of the present blitheness that was rather desperately affected by the chums of Study 12, as they still called themselves, although Study 12 was a thing of the past.

The hardships of the present conditions were no check upon the girls' spirits. Even Paula, accused of being such an inveterate grumbler, was at heart bravely resigned to roughing it. But what girl, loving the headmistress as much as Morcove's

scholars loved theirs, could be truly happy when the time was running out so fast!

And now suddenly, as Betty & Co. were making their way into the makeshift dining-hall, it gave them a more acute pang than ever to glimpse Miss Somerfield.

There she was, the unhappy woman who was the selected victim of that vendetta which the Lupinas had vowed against the name she bore. If Manuel Lupina could have struck at her brother, then she might have escaped. But Jack Somerfield, as Fate would have it, was beyond the reach of Manuel's savage spite, and the revengeful South American was not one to scruple about striking at a woman.

How she had aged just lately! some of the girls were thinking, as they watched her go by. A little whiter her hair; not quite so erect her carriage. Poor Miss Somerfield, surely counting the hours, if anyone was, that were running out so fast!

A few more days and nights, and then she would pay the price—the only price that the Lupinas would recognise, the one stipulation they had so cruelly made! If the scholars were ever to re-enter Morcove School again, it must be under another headmistress! As for Miss Somerfield, their revenge demanded that her career should be smashed, her heart riven by the enforced parting from her beloved school and its equally beloved scholars!

And yet, shameful as was the injury being done to Miss Somerfield, one girl in the school was base enough to be laughing up her sleeve about it all.

Cora Grandways—handsome, dashing Cora, always the one to do a malicious thing—she was finding it quite a joke to be secretly on the side of the Lupinas. The measure of Betty & Co.'s regret at the present state of things was the measure of Cora's delight.

Nor was she going to miss a single opportunity of aiding the Lupinas when she could. It had been her hope that she would be able to sow discontent in the school, but there had been no getting any of the other girls, so far, to revolt against the rough-and-ready conditions.

Still, it was something to the mischief-maker of the Form to be chumming up with the Lupina girls. Without a friend to call her own in the school—so utterly disgusted with her had the girls in general become—Cora was glad enough to have been able to form this secret alliance with the South American girls.

Dinner over, it was this same Cora Grandways who sought out Miss Redgrave, to beg a favour. Very demurely she began:

"If you please, Miss Redgrave, as it's a halfer this afternoon, could I be allowed to go to Morcove School to fetch my motor-cycle away?"

Miss Redgrave would never have looked as cold as she did if she had not formed a very grave suspicion in regard to the girl.

"I have not forgotten, Cora, last evening, when you were out with the machine, it broke down, so you say, and you had to leave it at the old school. But if you could not get it to go then, how can you get it to go now?"

"Oh, there's all the difference in the world!" Cora said, smiling blandly. "It was nearly dark then. I know my machine from 'A' to 'Z,' and can easily set it right by daylight."

The youthful mistress stood tight-lipped for a moment.

"Very well, Cora. But I do hope this doesn't mean any friendly conversations between you and those Lupina girls!"

No girl was better than Cora at being able to assume a virtuous look.

"Oh, Miss Redgrave, how can you suppose that I would be friendly with those girls, when it is their parents who are causing the school such trouble?"

Miss Redgrave's answer was to walk away, causing Cora to scowl after her.

"Better her, anyhow, even if she does suspect!" the disgrace to the Form muttered. "She can't prove it yet, and I'll take jolly good care neither she nor any of the girls get a chance to prove it!"

In a few minutes she was dressed for out of doors, and she came away from the ramshackle house to get hold of a bicycle. It meant borrowing some other girl's, and Cora cheekily decided that she might just as well borrow Betty's—with-out permission, either!

Away rode Cora, and how she was glorying in the thought that there would be nothing to do to her motor-cycle at Morcove School to get it to go! Nothing to do at all, except spend a very jolly, free-and-easy afternoon with the Lupina girls, unbeknown to anyone back yonder at Sawnton House!

Friends with the Enemy.

"ZILLA!"

"Yes, Jose?"

"She has come here again—that Morcove girl who is friendly with us. I see her coming up the path now."

It was the elder Lupina girl who spoke, from where she stood at a bed-room window of what used to be famous Morcove School.

She and her younger sister, Zilla, had come upstairs as soon as lunch with their millionaire parents was over. At this very moment Zilla Lupina was passing a comb through her glossy dark hair, smiling admiringly at her reflection as she did so.

"How nice if Cora Grandways can spend the afternoon with us, Jose!"

"She may have news for us, at least—good news!" the elder sister said, coming to the mirror to take a last look at herself.

Jose only paused to dash a few drops of costly scent upon a handkerchief before she followed her sister from the room and downstairs.

With extravagant affection, the sisters welcomed Cora as she came to the porch, after depositing her borrowed cycle in a sheltered corner near by.

"How nice of you to come!" Jose said, impulsively kissing the traitress of the school. "We are, oh, so dull, and now you shall liven us up!"

"Because there is something about you that we like so much," Zilla said, smiling.

"Well, it's a treat to get away from the others for a bit!" Cora grinned, going into the old school-house with them.

"Now, listen!" Zilla exclaimed clatedly. "Our father and mother have gone out in the car, so that is all the nicer, is it not? You can stay?"

"Oh, yes; I'm all right for time! I've got such a good excuse, you know," Cora said, with a wink.

"Ha, ha, ha! How she is clever—is she not, Jose?" pealed Zilla. "Come, then, Cora!"

They moved to the drawing-room. Cora had dressed to her best this afternoon, and she thrilled in her vain heart at the admiring glances she was drawing from such great dark eyes as these girls had.

"Where will you sit, then? Here—here is a nice place," Zilla prattled, taking Cora, at a run, across the fire room to a settee, and she made

the Morcove girl flop down with her. "Now you would like a cigarette—yes?"

"I would!" laughed Cora.

"And the news—what is the news?" Jose asked, coming across with a little silver casket of cigarettes. "Are there no other girls who wish to be like you—friendly with us?"

"They're such a lot of duffers!" was the best Cora could say to account for the implacable attitude of her schoolfellows. "If they had had any sense, they would have hurried up Miss Somerfield's departure."

"Ah, yes! And then at once they could all have been back in this school! They love the old place—is it not so? They would like to be back?"

"Wouldn't they just!"

"Then they are just too stupid, as you say!"



PAULA IS PERTURBED. "Weally, geals," said Paula, "I shall have to scwap these muddy shoes and stockings. That's what comes of playing hockey in a ploughed field, bai Jove!"

the younger Lupina girl scoffed. "No matter! We are here, and here we stay. Ha, ha! Yes!"

Jose Lupina took a seat where she had her sister and Cora in front of her, and as she smoked she gazed at Cora.

"You must be the prettiest girl in the school, Cora!"

"That's not saying much, for a plainer lot I never knew!" was Cora's derisive answer. "Oh, I shall be glad when I'm old enough to leave!"

"You would like to go to London, perhaps?"

"Yes, and get plenty of theatres and know crowds of people. That's my idea of life," nodded Cora, holding her handsome head high. "At the school all they think of is sport—sport!"

"In our country," Jose said, flicking the ash from her cigarette, "the girls are so different from yours. Would you like some tea?"

"But surely it is too early?"

"Oh, no; we have the tea whenever we wish!" Jose shrugged, getting up to touch the bell. "Besides, it gives the servant something to do." The door opened, and Jose spoke to the foreign servant who showed herself as she would have spoken to a dog.

"Some tea, quick!"

And the servant, old enough to be the girl's mother, bowed most humbly before withdrawing.

"I say, I like the way you give your orders!" Cora said, in genuine admiration. "Oh, this is jolly, being here with you!"

"You like it, do you?"

"Topping!" Cora declared, settling herself more comfortably than ever.

Jose Lupina, dropping back lazily into her chair, resumed the conversation in her low, rich voice:

"But say, then, Cora, it is all right—yes?—about Miss Somerfield? In the end, she is to go?"

"In the end, yes! Her last days are running out, and"—Cora had the ill grace to laugh, as if it were a great joke—"you should see the long faces there are over at Sawnton House! As for me—"

"You do not like the headmistress—no?"

"I've no use for any headmistress, that's what it means!" was Cora's sudden harsh answer. "Miss Somerfield is as good as any you'd get, but there's no love lost between us."

"It is those other girls she loves, perhaps?" suggested Zilla, with a wide grin. "The Form captain—What is her name?"

"Betty Barton? Oh, yes, Betty's always been a favourite!" Cora said, most untruthfully, for Miss Somerfield had never made favourites. "And Betty, of course, is going to be as sick as any of the girls when Miss Somerfield goes."

"As go she must!" Jose rejoined, with sudden ferocity. "That is, if this place is ever to be used as a school again. It would be the end of the world before my father, Manuel Lupina, would show mercy. In our country, when we hate, we hate!"

"So it seems!" grinned Cora. "The curious thing is, I am like that myself. Where Betty Barton is concerned—"

And there she broke off abruptly, sharply sitting erect, as she gazed in a frightened way towards the window.

For Jose Lupina had suddenly started to her feet, crying out excitedly "Look—look!" as she pointed.

At the window stood a girl, and it was Betty Barton!

Beyond Forgiveness.

AFTER the first shock of the surprise that it had meant for all three of them, Zilla began to laugh. But Jose frowned, as if her pride was hurt, whilst Cora fairly palpitated with dismay.

"Betty Barton!" she gasped. "And she has caught me here, with you!"

Jose Lupina crossed to the window, and flung it open.

"Well what do you want?" she demanded of Betty.

Betty looked straight past her into the room, to where Cora was.

"Cora," she exclaimed at that miscreant bitterly, "what about your denial that you were friendly with these girls?"

"These girls! You be careful how you speak!" flared out Zilla, drawing herself up. "You will please to show respect—"

"Respect!" And Betty smiled witheringly. "It's a fine lot of respect you and your parents deserve! But I am not wishing to talk to you!" "Then why do you come here?" panted Jose. "Take care! We make bad enemies, as you should know by now!"

"I'd rather have you as a bad enemy than as a bad friend!" was Betty's spirited answer. "Cora, if I reported this, you would be expelled on the spot!"

"And you will report it, no doubt!" sneered Cora, knowing full well that the Form captain would do nothing of the sort. "It is like your nosy nature to come prying and spying!"

"I am not spying!" was the indignant answer. "You have yourself to thank that I am here. You took my bike, and I want it. I was told that you had gone off with it."

"And so you walked all the way here to get it!" jeered Cora. "Glad of an excuse—"

"Nothing of the sort!" Betty said passionately. "My chums and I are going into Barncombe. I rode on the step of Polly's bike as far as the Morcove gates, then ran up here to claim my machine, knowing you were here."

"Well, if you want your bike, get it, and go!" Cora said as insolently as she could, causing the Lupina girls to exchange delighted smiles. "It's propped against a wall outside, between the bushes. So now—clear out!"

"Yes, you have no right here!" Jose said, stalking forward a step or so. "It will be time for you to come to this place when the school returns."

"And that will be when your silly old headmistress is gone! Ha, ha, ha!" scoffed Zilla.

The pair of them stood proudly before the angry-looking Form captain. Hands on hips, their slim bodies and poised heads well thrown back, they were alike in being the very limit for arrogance.

Silently Betty turned to walk away from the window. For the Lupina girls she had a glance of contempt; for Cora it was a look of extreme disgust.

"Friends with the enemy!" the Form captain said bitterly. "I have known you do some shabby things in your time, Cora, but this—Shame on you, shame!"

"Oh, run away!" snapped Cora. "Showing off in front of these girls! They don't need to be told what you think of yourself as captain!"

Betty scorned to answer that. She went away from the window, found her bicycle, and rode down the path to the gates. Her chums were there, each with a machine, and, even if she had wished to say nothing about what she had seen, it would have made no difference.

In her looks the other girls read what her experience had been.

"You found Cora—not mending her motor-bike!" Polly conjectured grimly. "We can guess what she was doing, Betty!"

"Yes, wather! Disgwaceful! Making friends with the enemy!"

"And so she will go on!" Betty said fiercely. "No stopping her, except by reporting it, and who could do that? Shame, I say again, when back there at Sawnton House is poor Miss Somerfield, faced with the hour when she must leave us, thanks to those Lupinas!"

There was a heavy pause. Then suddenly Madge Minden spoke, with slow impressiveness.

"I wonder," she said wistfully—"I wonder if,

even now, there is yet a chance to keep Miss Somerfield amongst us?"

It was like headstrong Polly to jump at that.

"You mean we might return to the attack, as it were?" she burst out eagerly. "Have another go at trying to persuade her from making the sacrifice? She was as firm as a rock that other time, but—"

"Bai Jove, geals!"

"Ooo, yes: queek—queek!" clamoured Naomer, doing one of her capers. "Eet make me feel I want to all the more, eef only to pay out Cora!"

"And we will!" proposed Betty emphatically. "As you say, Naomer, darling, if only as an answer to Cora's shabby goings-on, we'll see if, after all, we can't cheat the Lupinas out of their revenge!"

"Yes, wather!" beamed Paula. "Bai Jove, and if it means going on for years and years at Sawnton House, you'll never hear me gwumble, you know! Wather not, bai Jove!"

"Come on, then, to Barncombe, for that jaunt of ours and a cup of tea!" cried Polly, slamming her bike into position for riding away. "And when we get back to Sawnton House, we'll stir up the whole school!"

Nor had this spirited resolve of theirs lost any of its intensity by the time they returned from their ride. Betty & Co., early that evening, were absolute firebrands at Sawnton House, setting their schoolfellows aflame with the same passionate desire—to save Miss Somerfield, after all!

Once again Form meetings were held, and once again various resolutions were carried by all present. In effect, they said that the school would be heartbroken if Miss Somerfield adhered to her self-sacrificing resolve to leave at a certain date in the near future.

The scholars did not want to go back to Morcove School at such a bitter price. They could not think of it. Miss Somerfield must—she simply must—give way. Never mind the hardships of Sawnton House. They'd "stick it," if only she would allow herself to be turned aside from her splendid purpose!

And then suddenly, like wildfire, through the school the rumour spread. Perhaps Miss Somerfield would stay on for awhile longer, after all! Hurrah! The renewed resolutions had done it!

In that study which was the Sawnton House substitute for Study 12, Betty & Co. went wild with delight. Naomer danced around with Polly; Paula lay back in her easy-chair, and could not stop her simperings. In her own words, Paula was "pwofoundly gwatified!"

No word came from Miss Somerfield at the assembly before bed-time, as had been hoped, but the girls went up to the dormitories with good grounds for believing that there was something in the rumour. The school had been so emphatic in its fresh outburst of loyalty towards the doomed headmistress, that at last she had been tempted to give in to the general desire that she should remain amongst them all.

Wherefore, a very sulky Cora Grandways went to bed that night. It was the old, old story with Cora. When Betty & Co. had cause for jubilation, it was a time for her to feel mad with rage.

Clearly, she saw that she was going to look very foolish in the eyes of those Lupina girls when they learned that Miss Somerfield was going to remain on, after all. They would say she, Cora, should have been able to stop this fresh outburst of loyalty which Betty & Co. had started. Yet what could she do?

Now that things had taken a turn like this, what was there left for her to do?

Pondering desperately, as she lay in her bed in her dormitory, she was driven back upon the original plan that had been hers at the start. Make life at Sawnton House utterly impossible for the school, that was the only thing! But how—how?

In a flash, came at least one daring idea. Unless she was greatly mistaken, there was one way of making life at Sawnton House more than uncomfortable—absolutely intolerable!

It meant leaving her bed presently, when the others should be fast asleep, and creeping downstairs. So she kept awake, and whilst doing so her crafty mind toyed with the scheme she had hit upon. One bit of mischief and another occurred to her, until at last she was thinking what a silly she had been not to carry out such plans before.

The dormitory was dead quiet, except for the measured breathing of the other girls as they slept, when at last Cora reached a hand under her pillow to take out her wrist-watch.

It had an illuminated dial, and she saw the glimmering hands pointing to twelve o'clock.

Midnight! Safe enough now, surely!

Softly she slid from her warm bed, and groped for her dressing-gown.

Stealthily she put on her stockings and slippers, and then, very cautiously, she stole away to the door and passed along to the stairs.

Her Midnight Misdeed.

DOWN through the great old ramshackle house Cora made her way at this midnight hour, and her errand, whatever its purpose might be, took her to the domestic quarters.

There, in the enormous kitchen, she went to the great range by which the cooks did all the cooking for so many mouths. For her daring plan was nothing less than this—to render cooking for the staff and scholars an utter impossibility!

How the Lupina girls would admire her for this, she was thinking, with all the old pride in being so crafty.

The moon to-night was shining very brilliantly, being at the full. She had no difficulty in seeing what she was about. Nor was it long before she felt assured that the deed could be done, and done thoroughly.

The kitchen range was in a poor state, the dampers loose, and much of the back part cracked, with bolts scarce holding the ironwork together. She understood the working of the thing, and soon her rascally hands were busy with the back of the stove.

She had to keep her sleeves rolled above the elbow, and even so there was a great danger of her soiling her clothing. Thanks to the bright moonlight, however, she managed successfully. In a few minutes, she had contrived to block the back of the stove with bricks that were loose, and also with some iron plating moved out of place.

This done, Cora craftily sought a hearth-broom, and swept up any dust that would have been visible in the morning. Then she crept away and upstairs to her bed, and the old foxy grin was on her face as she snuggled down to sleep.

Wait till breakfast-time! The girls would be less keen about "sticking it" at Sawnton House then!

Perhaps it was the excitement over the sudden prospect of getting Miss Somerfield to hold out against the Lupinas, after all; be that as it might, Sawnton House woke up very early next morning. Betty & Co. were some of the first to "out of



THE GIRL THEY HATED! Jose Lupina started to her feet and pointed to the window. "Look! Look!" she cried. At the window stood a girl, and it was Betty Barton!

bed" and dress. There was joking and laughter and some blithe singing, all because they saw a chance of still having Miss Somerfield with them. And if her staying on was to mean no return to Morecove School—well, never mind!

"Haw, haw, haw! Wather not, bai Jove!" Paula simpered gaily. "You won't catch me gwumbling, geals. After all, Sawnton House is not so bad—what?"

"As time goes on, things should go smoothly enough," agreed Betty. "It's a bit ramshackle, and, of course, we miss the playing-fields and so on, but—"

"The main thing is, not to go back to Morecove School at Miss Somerfield's expense!" Polly exclaimed boisterously, as she finished dressing. "Anything rather than that!"

"Yes, wather! Let them do their wovst, those Lupina wetches, we'll stick it! Geals, I feel I could put up with any hardships wather than—My, gwacious, though! Pooh! Smoke!"

And instantly elegant Paula looked glum enough. She didn't like smoky fires, and there was one somewhere this morning.

"Hum, yes!" Polly said, sniffing.

Then she ran to the door.

"Good laws! I say—"

"What's the matter, Polly? Oh!" was the cry from several of them, as they joined her outside the dormitory, and found the reek of smoke worse than ever. Much worse!

A moment more, and they were all charging downstairs to find out what and where the trouble was. Other girls were doing the same. Guided by the increasing density of the smoke, they were led towards the kitchens, where some very vexatious cries greeted them.

"Keep out o' here, you girls, please!" screeched one of the cooks. "Such a smother as it is!"

"And if you get any meals cooked to-day, it will be a marvel!" was another lamentable cry.

Paula looked aghast.

"Geals, geals, did you heah that, bai Jove? Heah's a tewwible catastowphe! Oh, this wetchted Sawnton House!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Who was it said she would never grumble again?" laughed Polly. "Cook, what's the trouble, then?"

Mirthful Polly was not the only scholar raising that entreaty for information. To make herself heard, the stout old dame who was head cook had to yell at the top of her voice, through the smother:

"Trouble! The range is all to pieces, and what to do we don't know! Can't get a fire at all!"

"Oh, dear! Ha, ha, ha!"

It was a joke at present to the girls. Some of them beat a retreat, to get away from the smother, making laughing comments on this fresh upset. Others braved the smoke, which had billowed from the range, to confer more or less compassionate remarks upon the domestics in a spirit of levity.

"Ah, you may laugh," the chief cook said, herself forced to join in the merriment, "but there'll be some glum faces amongst you by-and-by!"

And there were!

Breakfast-time that morning was a most doleful affair for the scholars.

Cooking had proved a sheer impossibility, and at one table and another the platters held only plain bread-and-butter, and not nearly enough marmalade to go round!

The delicious porridge and hot milk that used to be Morecove's first course—not here this morning! And where was the bacon and eggs which always followed? The bacon and eggs were in the larder—uncooked!

Miss Redgrave, presiding at the Fourth Form table, smiled forlornly.

"Really, it is too hard upon you, girls!"

"Not a bit!" cried Polly, with a face as jolly as the rising sun. "We don't mind!" She saw Paula looking very glum. "Do we, Paula, darling?"

"Er—er—oh, no!" Paula agreed, with a bit of an effort. "It's quite all right—yes, wather!"

"Have another slice, dear!" Polly coaxed, passing the bread-and-butter. "Nice and thick this morning, to make up for what isn't here!"

"Er—pweicisely!"

"Then make a good brekker, Paula!"

"Thanks—thanks, Polly, darling! I—er—yes, wather!"

And Paula, rather reluctantly, took another slice.

A moment later, when she swallowed, she winced.

"Good, nutritious fare," teased Polly, in a motherly tone.

"Nutwitious—yes, wather, Polly, deah! But —"

"As for cold milk, instead of tea, I always hold, Paula," the madcap went on primly, keeping the table on the grin, "tea is bad for young girls like you. It's refreshing, we know. Still, it will do you good to go without, Paula, won't it?"

At the mention of tea, Paula had looked like fainting. Tea! Hot and strong and sweet, with a good dash of milk! How she loved her cup, poor Paula, with only cold milk in front of her now!

"You are not drinking your—milk," Polly remarked, with great concern for the long-suffering one, "Drink it off, there's a good child!"

Then the other tables must have wondered what the great joke was amongst the Fourth Form girls, such peals of laughter went up. Polly had spoken as if the milk were medicine, and, indeed, Paula could not have made a wryer face over it if it had been medicine!

Miss Somerfield herself made mention of the breakdown in the kitchen when the school assembled for classes. Nothing, she said, had distressed her more than this, in connection with the makeshift state of affairs at Sawnton House. The range would be put right as soon as possible, but—

And here it was that Cora, listening along with all the rest of the girls, had cause for exulting in secret.

"It all goes to show, my dear girls," the head-mistress continued sadly, "how utterly unfit this place is for the purpose to which it is being put. What can I do, then, when you still implore me to carry on here with you? Overnight I really was wondering if I might see the term through, with all of you, here at Sawnton House. But now—"

"Don't let it change your mind, please, Miss Somerfield," headstrong Polly suddenly felt bound to sing out, "just because we've had a muddled brekker for once!"

"Hear, hear! Morcove for ever!" the spirited cry instantly followed, and for a few moments all was wild cheering, causing Miss Somerfield to look suddenly overcome with emotion.

"Ah, girls," she exclaimed, with great feeling, as soon as she could gain a hearing, "once again, it is so entirely good of you, so loyal and loving to me! But I do feel that this morning's upset is a fresh warning to me—to get you back to Morcove School, no matter what the cost to myself!"

"But—"

"At any rate, if there is another upset after this," Miss Somerfield exclaimed earnestly, "I shall take it as a sign that we cannot go on like this!"

There was someone in the assemblage who, when she heard that firm statement, promptly made a vow to herself. Cora Grandways fiercely determined that it should not be long before another upset did occur.

Meantime, she thought she could detect signs here and there of her mischief in the night having achieved her desire effect.

Were there not a few girls who were now inclined to feel that this state of things had gone on long enough? Cora felt sure there was. Her eyes and ears were open as she mingled with her schoolfellows. She saw a gloomy face now and then, and more than once she heard pessimistic murmurs. So it looked as if there would soon be a definite section of girls who were utterly "fed up!"

Nothing could be done to the range that day, so cunningly had Cora wrecked the back part of it in the night, and how she laughed up her sleeve to hear it being said that the trouble was all due to the stove being so very old and broken about!

Cold corned beef took the place of the usual hot joint that dinner-time. No cooked vegetables, either!

"Oh, dear!" Grace Garfield grimaced, as she took her seat with the rest at the Fourth Form table. "Is there a war on?"

"Yes, there is," Betty answered promptly—"a war between ourselves and the Lupinas!"

"And we shall beat them yet!" Polly rejoined

heartily. "Corned beef—I love it! Don't you, Paula, dear?"

"Er—I have no doubt, Polly, dear, it is extremely nutritious. Oh, yes," Paula assented, very slowly taking up her knife and fork, "it is quite a—er—quite an agreeable change, for once!"

"The girl who grumbles," grinned Polly, "is a traitress to the school!"

Cora's eyes flashed round the table. Good! Not every girl was looking as if she was quite heart and soul with that spirited sentiment which Polly had expressed. Grace Garfield and Ella Elgood were murmuring to each other in rather a discontented fashion. A little more, and the discontent would be widespread.

What was the next bit of mischief, then, that she could lay her hands to?

If only she could cause another upset to the actual feeding arrangements for the whole school, what a coup that would be!

An Offer Refused.

AFTER school that day, Cora prowled around, trying to think of, or find, some fresh deed to do in secret. At the same time, she wished there was a chance of seeing the Lupina girls, for she wanted to report the upset already caused.

She dared not go over to Morcove again, however. Yesterday she had been caught by Betty. Next time it might be Miss Redgrave.

And then suddenly, round about six o'clock, she had the great surprise of seeing that Jose and Zilla Lupina had turned up here at Sawnton House!



GRAVE NEWS, INDEED! The girls rushed out of the dormitory, to find Miss Redgrave hastening to them with the candle aflame. "This is serious!" she announced. "Any number of tiles have blown off, and rain is simply pouring in!"

Cora was alone, as usual, when she suddenly encountered the two girls near by the makeshift school. Neither she nor the Lupinas were reckless enough to indulge in any effusive greetings, but they were soon whispering eagerly.

"Fancy your daring to come here!" was Cora's admiring whisper. "It is going to rattle the girls no end!"

"We have an offer to make them," Jose said softly, her dark eyes agleam. "But, tell us, how are things going on, Cora?"

"Splendidly!" was the exultant answer, and, in a few words, the traitress of the school reported the breakdown in the kitchen. "The girls will never stand that sort of thing. Some are grumbling at last!"

"Make it worse for them, Cora, and I have my mother's promise that you shall be rewarded," was the elder sister's impressive whisper. "In the holidays, when we are in London, you shall stay at our so-fine town house!"

"You would like that—yes?" breathed Zilla. "Remember, then, it is a promise. And now, Jose—"

"Yes, let us go in and make our offer!"

Jose said it with sudden imperiousness, and both she and her equally arrogant sister marched, head in air, to the front door. What was an even greater piece of impudence, they boldly marched into the house, as the door was standing open, and ascended to Betty & Co.'s study.

The chums were just settling down to prep. As the door opened, revealing the Lupina girls, in all their finery and offensive pride, six or seven Morcovians leapt to their feet indignantly.

"What cheek!" burst out Polly furiously. "To come butting in here—"

"Yes, wather! Outwageous, bai Jove! Geals—"

"What do you want?" Betty asked curtly. "For the sooner we see the backs of you, the better!"

"The English girls choose to be rude to us, Jose!" grinned Zilla.

"You surely don't expect us to be very civil?" came from Helen Craig scornfully. "For two pins, I'd go for you, and put you out!"

"And I'd lend a hand—pretty quickly, too!" cried Polly. "So you'd best clear out, before we—"

"I think," interrupted Jose, standing haughtily inside the doorway, "you will be sorry for the way you have received us when you know why we are here. For we have come to do you a favour!"

The girls received this with withering smiles.

"By this time," Jose went on loftily, "you must be wishing you could get a game of hockey in a proper field. So, then! Senor Manuel Lupina is willing that you should have the use of the old playing-field at Morcove. You can come there to play games whenever you like."

"Indeed!" Betty said drily.

"My father makes this allowance," Jose continued, "because he understands that it is only a question of a few days before Miss Somerfield leaves you."

"Then your father is mightily mistaken!"

"Yes, wather, bai Jove!"

"Miss Somerfield is not going to leave us!" Betty spoke up vehemently. "You can go back to your father—"

"And tell him—" chimed in Polly fiercely.

"With anything but our kind regards!" added Helen bitterly.

"Yes, wather! The howwid old wetch! Geals—"

"Tell him," Betty said passionately, "that we are going to hold out against him yet! We shall stay, and get Miss-Somerfield to remain our headmistress, even if the roof falls in!"

"Hear, hear!" Polly fairly shouted, and next moment there was such an outburst of defiant cries from the chums as a body that Jose and Zilla cowered back.

"Clear out! Get away, you two!"

"Or else—" Polly took up the war-like cry which Betty had started. "Girls, why make any bones about it? They've no right to come here! Out with them!"

"Hooway! Yes, wather!"

"Ooo, yes; queek—queek!"

And suddenly, indignation getting the better of them, the chums were actually hustling Jose and Zilla from the room.

Round to the stairs, and down them, the objectionable visitors were driven, with many a push to help them on their way. Both girls were deathly pale at this affront to their dignity—as they deemed it to be—and once Zilla flashed out a hand to try and fetch little Naomer a smack across the cheek.

"You dare!" Polly panted, darting in in-time to dash the raised hand aside. "Two can play at that game, just remember!"

In a few moments the Lupina girls were out of the house, raging inwardly at the humiliation they had brought upon themselves. They each glared back at the Morcovians as they were going off, and if looks could kill, Betty & Co. would have met with sudden annihilation just then!

"These English girls—bah!" cried Jose, striding on, with hands tightly clenched. "But wait! They cannot hold out much longer!"

"And now it is going to rain!" Jose said, looking quite beside herself with rage. "This wretched country! Zilla, hurry, or we shall get wet."

The added humiliation it was for them to have to start running, with the rain catching them in all their fine clothes!

Girls of a calmer temperament would have sought shelter somewhere, since this looked like being quite a heavy storm. But it was like these foreign girls to be panicky in any sudden plight, and all they thought of doing was to rush on, getting thoroughly drenched.

A good west-country downpour was this that had been threatening, had they known it, ever since early morning! Ere they were half-way back to the old schoolhouse, Jose and Zilla were a most bedraggled pair, almost weeping with rage. The last half-mile was a mad rush through blinding rain, for by that time it was coming down harder than ever.

"Let us hope that those English girls get drowned out, over at that old house!" was all Jose could say savagely, when at last she and her sister were indoors. "We shall have good news then from Cora!"

But Sawnton House, whatever its other failings might be, still had a water-tight roof, proof against even a storm as violent as this one. Or, rather, it would have withstood the deluge, right enough, if there had been no Cora Grandways to work mischief with it in secret!

After dark that evening, Cora made her way, unobserved, up to the lofts under the tiles. The rain had ceased, but she knew that the glass was very low, giving warning of a very violent night. Here, then, was another bit of mischief for her hands to perpetrate!

For several minutes she was alone up there in the lofts, stealthily fumbling and pushing at the slates. When at last she craftily crept away, to return downstairs, she could afford to smile her foxy smile again.

"Now let the wind and rain come!" she was thinking gleefully. "They'll be marvels if they still want to stay at Sawnton House when half the roof is gone!"

What a Night!

SWOO-OOH! howled the midnight gale. Hiss, hiss—ss! the rain came against the dormitory windows at ramshackle Sawnton House. Patter-patter—swooo-oh!—hiss!

A bed creaked, as its occupant suddenly turned upon her back.

"My gwacious!" came a dismayed whisper from Paula Creel. "Geals, are you awake?"

Then Polly's chuckle sounded.

"It appears to be raining!"

"Waining, bai Jove!" Oh, healp, this is fwightful!"

"How the balmy breezes blow!" jested on Morcove's madcap. "Those windows, they can't be very strong; they are so old. I suppose they'll hold out?"

"Polly, deah, don't!" shivered Paula. "Haow can you geals laugh? The prospect, bai Jove, of having those windows blown out is no joke, you know! Ah, dear!"

And she punched her pillow, intending to settle again to sleep—if she could!

Swooo-oh! Rumble, rumble! Hiss, patter, bur-room! went wind and rain together. Bur-room, howl!

"Dweadful, dweadful!" moaned Paula. "There's not a bit of peace, geals. I— Healp!"

"Well, what now?" sang out Polly, in the dark.

"Geals, healp! I felt a twickle of water on my nose!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't laugh! It's sewious! Water's coming in at the woof—it must be!" groaned Paula, flouncing about in her bed. "My goodness, gwacious me, I'm dwenched!"

"Really? Phew, I say!" Betty was exclaiming, in genuine dismay, when suddenly the door opened wide, letting in a gleam of candlelight.

Miss Redgrave was there, in dressing-gown and slippers, and candle in hand.

"Girls, are you all right, because—"

"All wight? Miss Wedgwase, come and look! Howwows, I'm getting 'drowned out!" wailed Paula, and she fairly fell out of her bed. "Healp!"

The others were all sitting up in their beds, half scared and half amused. Miss Redgrave made a rush with the candle to Paula's corner, and then recoiled in dismay.

"Dear, dear! I feared as much! Slates have been blowing about. Once I thought half the roof was going! Don't catch cold, Paula, dear; wrap yourself up."

"Nothing mattahs now!" was the despairing sigh from poor, luckless Paula. "If I am to pewish, let me pewish at once!"

Yet it looked as if she still had a great desire to take care of her precious self, as she hastily donned her lovely dressing-gown.

Miss Redgrave hurried away, whilst the girls quickly got into warm raiment, for the draughts raging through Sawnton House were ferocious to-night. With a really grave concern for the old house during this raging gale, the chums surged

forth from the dormitory, to find Miss Redgrave hastening back, with the candle aflame.

"It is truly serious!" she exclaimed. "Any number of tiles must have blown off. Rain is simply pouring in!"

"Howwows!" was Paula's despairing comment. "Then this, geals, is the end of our staying heah, bai Jove!"

"No!" was Polly's vehement answer. "Betty said even if the roof falls in, and what we girls say we mean!"

By now all Sawnton House had roused up. Numerous candles glimmered on stairs and in passages, fitfully revealing various clusters of the alarmed inmates. Some of the mistresses, with the intention of going up to the lofts under the roof, had put on macs over their dressing-gowns. Carrying electric torches, they went hurrying past the girls who thronged the stairway.

A little time elapsed before one of them—Miss Somerfield herself—returned to a lower landing. In the wavering candle-light, the girls saw how very distressed she looked.

"Several sections of the roof are open to the sky!" was her sorrowful announcement. "And nothing can be done to-night; it is a job for skilled men. You poor girls—"

"We are all right!" asserted many of them gaily, and even Paula could be heard giving a desperate:

"Yes, wather!"

But Cora, as she mingled with the press of girls, heard some more of these gloomy, murmuring. They came from girls whose spirit was not proving equal to the continued strain.

"Sickening business!" Cora heard Anna Silke, of the Fifth Form, exclaim. "How can we go on like this?"

"I shall write home and ask to be taken away," Millie Ashwell grimaced. "Impossible existence, this!"

Then these two girls found Grace Garfield and Ella Elgood, of the Fourth Form, turning to them, as if they felt it was time for those who felt discontented to get together.

"It's all very well, this idea of sticking it out," mumbled Grace, "but it's going too far!"

"It's ridiculous!" exclaimed Ella. "We shall have to go back to Morcove School in the end, so we ought to go at once, that's my opinion."

And she did not mind stating it pretty loudly, either.

Cora's eyes were flashing this way and that, ready to spot other discontented faces. Nor did she look in vain for them. All the chums of Study 12, and a great number of other girls whose spirit always was indomitable, they, of course, were content. They would be! But Cora had the malicious joy of seeing that a good percentage of the scholars were at last thoroughly "fed up."

There was little more rest for the girls that night. Owing to the rifts in the roof, the rain penetrated to many of the very bed-rooms, and the chums of Study 12 were only a few of those who had to roll up in blankets on the ground floor.

All this, of course, aggravated the discomfort. It was what Cora had planned, and she had certainly succeeded. The tardy dawnlight, when at last the trying night was over, revealed wan-faced scholars, many of whom were openly saying they would not stand it another day.

But Cora was not going to let it rest at this. She felt like one who has got the enemy "on the run." Now to keep them going! If only she could strike again, and strike hard, before Betty

Barton and others of that stamp rallied those whose spirits were drooping!

It seemed, too, as if the very Fates were in her favour in this secret campaign of treachery against the headmistress and the school.

After such breakfast as the school had been able to get, with the kitchen range still so defective, the mischief-worker took a saunter out of doors. She was quite alone, as usual, wanting to ponder what next she could do in the way of upsetting the place, and suddenly a splendid chance confronted her.

Coming to the only road that led to Sawnton House, she found that the torrents of rain had brought down rivers of water from the hills round about, and one roaring torrent was brawling through a culvert under the road.

What Cora instantly noticed was that one end of the small tunnel under the roadway was in danger of being stopped under. For the rush of water had brought down many branches that the gale had stripped from the trees. Supposing, then, she succeeded in completely blocking the outlet for the water!

She simply thrilled at the idea. Its success would mean such a calamity for the school! If only she could prevent the water from flowing under the road, and so getting away to still lower ground, Sawnton House would be cut off by a mighty flood!

With all the old caution, the crafty girl looked around to make sure that she was unobserved. Then, with a rush, she was at the low fence to one side of the road, peering over at the swirling waters which were even now accumulating.

The bough of a tree was floundering in the flood. She reached out, and managed to catch at a branch of it, and then pulled hard.

The current helped to bring it closer in against the low arch. By a good deal of pulling and twisting, Cora at last jammed down the big branch so that it finally dammed the water-course under the road.

That done, she had only to watch for a minute longer to see the rapid rise of the water.

Bigger and bigger the lake of brown flood water grew beside the road. All at once, she had to step back, because the flood was running out on to the roadway itself.

Five minutes more, and she was standing several yards away, with one big sheet of deep water covering the road.

"What a lark!" she chuckled to herself, as she turned to go back to Sawnton House. "Not a single tradesman will be able to get to Sawnton House now with the provisions! I would like the Lupina girls to know about this! Ha, ha, ha!"

Not Beaten Yet.

ABOUT eleven o'clock that morning a motor delivery-van came bounding along the only road from Barncombe to Sawnton House.

It bore a name that was dear to the hearts of Betty & Co.—"The Barncombe Creamery." From that famous baker's and pastrycook's, in the distant Devonshire town, Morecove School had always been supplied with its bread, butter, and cream. Daily now the van was having to run the extra distance to Sawnton House, to keep that makeshift establishment supplied.

But suddenly the driver of the van slowed up in an alarmed way, keeping his hand ready upon the brake.

He had come round a bend in the road, to find himself confronted with an enormous sheet of flood water!

Warily he let the motor-van run close to the flood, and he even drove a few yards into the water, in the hope of getting through without a hitch. All in a moment, however, he checked to a standstill.

"No use!" was his glum comment. "Another yard, and the water would be up to my engine. Here's a nice thing! I'm just about stopped for good!"

He was starting to back out of the water, when a sudden burst of girlish cries made him look ahead across the flood. Some seven or eight of the scholars were excitedly running down to the water's edge, appalled at this fresh catastrophe that was meeting their eyes.

"Oh, good gracious!" exclaimed Polly. "Why, it looks as if that van will never be able to get through!"

"The Barncombe Cweamewy, bai Jove, with all the bread!"

"Ha, ha, ha! What a fix we shall be in, if——"

"Fix!" groaned Paula. "Geals, do you realise this means starvation?"

"Oh, fiddle!" laughed Polly, and she joined Betty and others in hailing the driver.

"Can't you come on?"

"Not I!" was the rueful response. "The water would be over the wheels."

"Then what will you do?"

"Blessed if I know!" was the helpless answer, drawing a sighing remark from Paula.

"Ah, dear! First one thing, geals, and then another. I am not gwumblin—no! But this weally is howwible!"

Nor could her chums continue to treat the matter as a joke.

They and Sawnton House were on one side of this impassable flood; on the other side were the day's supplies for the kitchen!

"Bother it!" fumed Betty. "The very worst thing that could have happened! For this will just about decide Miss Somerfield that she must give in, after all!"

"After last night's affair, too!" deplored Madge.

"But," burst out Helen, "can't we save the situation, somehow, so that Miss Somerfield will never know?"

"Ah, that's the idea!" Polly applauded heartily. "We have five minutes of our break still left. Come on!"

In her headstrong way, she rushed off to see if a crossing place could be found, right away from the flooded area. Some of her chums ran with her, others went in the opposite direction. Polly's party met with insuperable conditions—acres of low-lying ground, all under water that had accumulated before the culvert got dammed up.

Nor did searchers in the other direction meet with encouraging conditions. They made their way on to higher ground, but here there was the broad stream that was torrenting down a hillside gully, feeding the flood waters on the road.

Betty shook her head ruefully.

"Even if we took off our shoes and stockings," she said, "we could hardly pick our way all that distance down to the motor-van. It's nothing but brambles and stones."

"Then how about paddling through the water that lies on the road?" suggested Dolly Delane. "Too deep?"

They went back to find out, rejoining Polly's party there. On the other side of the flood was the driver, sitting in the van, which he was now backing out of the water.

"If I could do anything, I would!" he sang out,

filling a pipe. "But it don't look to me as if you'll get any bread to-day!"

"Then we shall slowly pewish of starvation, that's all," Paula said resignedly.

"Oh, don't grumble!"

"Who's gwumbling, Polly, deah? I am merely wealising that this is the end of ewevything!"

"Is it?" Betty suddenly laughed, starting to take off her shoes and stockings. "I think I see what to do!"

And in half a minute she was clambering, bare-footed, on to the fence that, in the centre of the flood, was half submerged.

The others raised a cheer. Guessing her intention, they were not slow to back her up. Off came the shoes and stockings of Polly, Helen, and Dolly, and after Betty those three girls scrambled along the fence, with the flood all around them.

The rest of the girls would have gone also, but they could not have hoped to be of any use. Their additional weight might even have spoilt everything, by causing the fence to break.

Instantly the flood waters roared loudly through the drain under the road, and big eddies appeared.

"Hurrah!" cheered the four on the fence, whilst those who had been forced to stand and watch shouted their applauding comments.

"Bwavo, you geals! Haw, haw, haw! Nevah say die!"

"A fine lot you've done!" Polly called teasingly to Paula, as the four of them started to work back to dry land. "Oh, I nearly went that time!"

"Look—look, the water ees going down so quick!" was Naomer's excitable cry, and she fairly danced with delight. "Eet soon go from the road now!"

"Yes, wather! Bwavo, you geals! We shall get our bwead, after all!"

Is It Defeat?

BACK on the dry roadway, hastily the daring four dried their feet and ankles with handkerchiefs, and then resumed shoes and stockings. Meantime, the motor-vanman got back



FOOD AND FAMINE! The driver of the van was trying to back it out of the flood. "If I could get through I would," he shouted to Betty & Co. "But it looks to me as though you won't get any bread to-day!"

Betty leading, out to the centre of the flood worked all four girls, their bare feet treading middle rails of the fence that the water had reached. Eagerly they eyed that butt-end of a branch which they were going to pull at, all together, in the hope of unstopping the culvert.

Betty got to it first, and wriggled along the fence, so as to make all possible room for her chums. As soon as they each had a hold of the branch, which hardly showed above the water, they all shouted:

"Now, then—heave!"

And they heaved. How they dragged and worked at the jammed bough, gasping for breath, as again and again the united effort was repeated.

"Once more!" puffed Polly. "Ha, ha, ha! I hope I don't fall off the fence for laughing! Now, girls—"

"This time does it!"

And it did!

The bough suddenly swirled free, and, with a quick and furious pull, they got it right away from the culvert.

to, his seat at the wheel, ready to drive through the flood as soon as it should be shallow enough.

"I say, you won't mention this up at the house?" Betty sang across to him. "We don't want Miss Somerfield to know."

"Well, if you'd rather I didn't, all right," came the answer. "But I reckon you girls deserve a word o' praise. I only wish I could ha' lent a hand, but it weren't possible from this end."

Rapidly as ever, the flood was subsiding. After a minute, so much shallower had the flood become that the man started the van, and drove very slowly into the water.

"Can you manage already?" was Madge's wondering cry.

"She'll be all right up to ten inches or so, miss. We'll see. Whoa!"

And he stopped again, to let the water go lower still.

Thus, bit by bit, he came on through the ever-shallowing flood, skilfully keeping the water from reaching any vital part of the engine. It was exciting work to watch, and Betty and her chums clean forgot the flight of time. To see the van

emerge triumphantly at last on their side of the flooded area made them run on beside it, cheering wildly.

"Hurrah!"

"Haw, haw, haw! Plenty of bwead now—yes, wather!" beamed Paula. "So that's all wight!"

Wild with relief they felt, not simply because the supplies had got through, and so there would be no going on "short rations." The great thing was that Miss Somerfield would never be any the wiser about the incident. It would have helped to make her feel how utterly impossible life was at Sawnton House, if the only road that served it was liable to be flooded like that.

With sheepish grins, the chums had to go to their places in class some minutes after "break" had ended. Miss Redgrave gave them a very serious look of displeasure, and at the midday dismissal she did not omit to call Betty to her for an explanation.

"What made you and your chums come in late from break, Betty?"

That, of course, meant telling what had happened; but it was only another minute before Betty could hurry away to rejoin her chums, looking as serene as ever. Miss Redgrave had as good as promised to "keep it dark," so that the headmistress might not feel more worried than ever.

Polly and most of the others were upstairs in the study. As Betty entered, she felt impelled to fling an arm about the madcap's shoulders. So jolly it was to feel that, no matter what happened, the Morcove spirit was proving equal to it!

"Bai Jove, wather!" beamed Paula, lying back in her easy-chair, hands clasped behind her head. "We are the ones! The ever weadies—what?"

"I like the 'we'!" was Polly's scathing retort. "Still, I suppose you don't mean it half the time you are grumbling, Paula."

"Gwumblin'—me? Now, geals, I ask you—" But before Paula could indignantly voice her self-defensive question, the door flashed open, letting in Dolly Delane with a rush.

"Girls, here's a horrid bit of news!" she panted. "Miss Somerfield has just had the cruellest upset of all!"

"What upset? What now, Dolly?"

That girl closed the door, then spoke on breathlessly:

"The headmistress came, by accident, upon a number of girls who were all talking one way—that she ought to go, and so put an end to this state of things!"

"Girls—not in our Form?" was Betty's sharp question. "Oh, Dolly, don't say—"

"Yes! I only wish I could say that none of the Fourth are in it. But there are Fourth Formers—Grace Garfield, Ella Elgood, and one or two others, along with Anna Silke and Millie Ashwell, of the Fifth."

With furious strides, Betty crossed to the door. "I must see into this!" she exclaimed, through set-teeth. "Where are they? Do you know, Dolly?"

Before that girl could answer, the door was opened, and another scholar came in—Cora Grandways!

Looking very elated about something, she flourished a paper that she held.

"I thought I'd come here first, this being the captain's study!" she said derisively. "This is a round-robin that some of us are getting girls to sign who have had enough of Sawnton House. Betty Barton, perhaps you would care to—"

"Sign it? I'll do this!" Betty said, and, snatching at the sheet, she tore it across and across, casting the pieces of paper in Cora's face.

"You—you—"

"Get outside!" Betty said in a voice that was choked with anger, and next second she had seized handsome Cora and simply bundled her out of the room, slamming the door upon her.

"Bravo, Betty!" cried Polly excitedly. "I like the way you did it!"

"Ah, but just think!" was Betty's sighing exclamation, standing there, her face white with anger. "Think what it means! After all we've done, put up with, the solid front we've shown, some of them are wanting to give in!"

"Even though it means letting down the headmistress," Madge said in a low tone of extreme sadness. "Oh, how can they?"

"And the headmistress knows!" Betty went on emotionally. "I don't wonder you called it the cruellest upset of all, Dolly. So it is—cruel, cruel hard on her!"

"Then what can we do?" burst out Helen wildly.

There was a heavy pause.

"Do?" sighed Betty, at last. "What can we do now—now that Miss Somerfield knows there are those who want her to pay the price for all our sakes?"

She sat down, and, thumping both elbows upon the table, rested her head between clenched hands. Again there was a heavy, almost tragic silence—the silence of despair.

Nor were the girls' eyes free from the shine of tears bravely held back, as they stood gathered there, feeling their failure so keenly—their failure to hold the Form together in this stand against the enemy.

From a near-by room came, suddenly, the loud laugh of Cora Grandways, and, as they heard it, Betty & Co. seemed to hear also the mocking, triumphant laughs of Jose and Zilla Lupina.

Those heartless, detestable girls! And then to know that in the very heart of the school were those who had gone over to the enemy like this!

"I think," murmured Betty, at last, sorrowfully, "this is the blackest hour that Morcove School has ever known."

"There will be a blacker one," sighed Madge—"the hour, inevitable now, when we all go back to the old school, on the cruel terms that the Lupinas named!"

(END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.)

Does this mean the end of Betty & Co.'s efforts? Can the spiteful plot of the Lupinas succeed in thus forcing Miss Somerville to leave the school? These are questions which, naturally, you are all asking yourselves, and to which you will find answers in next week's magnificent story of this series, which is entitled, "When Morcove Was Homeless!" Don't miss it, girls, for, in addition to all our usual splendid features, I am giving away a magnificent stand-up photograph in colours of H.R.H. the Prince of Wales—the first of three similar gifts which no reader should miss. As there is bound to be a tremendous rush for this great free gift number, you would be well advised to order your copy NOW!