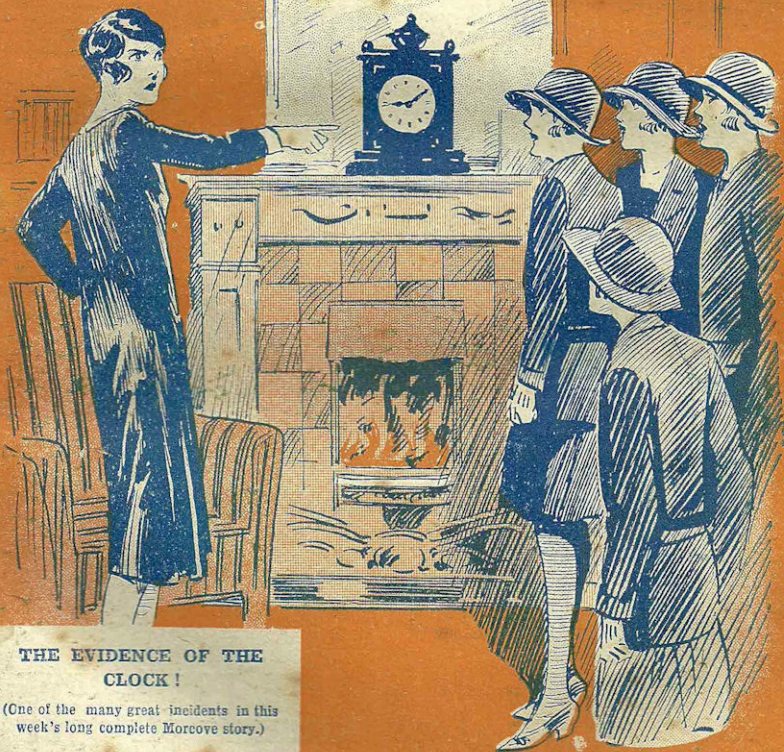


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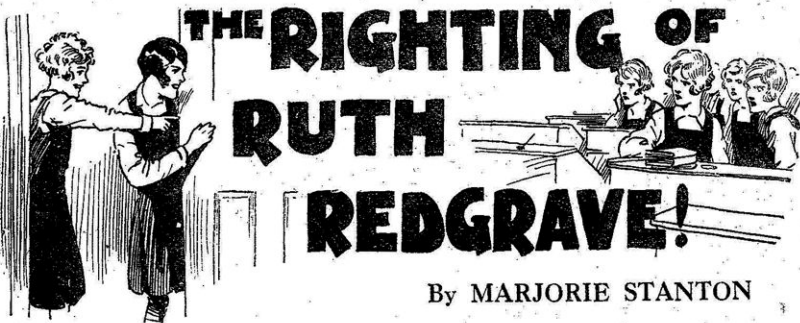
The Schoolgirls' Own 2nd



**THE EVIDENCE OF THE
CLOCK !**

(One of the many great incidents in this week's long complete Morcove story.)

A most enthralling story featuring Betty Barton and Co. of Morcove School.



By MARJORIE STANTON

It is Study 12's dearest wish to make things right again for Miss Redgrave, their own beloved, chummy Form-mistress, who, through the enmity of Miss Cunliffe, has been dismissed from the school. You will revel in every word of this fine story that tells how loyally they worked to this end.

Ruled with the Rod!

THE class may now—dismiss! Those girls who are boarding in Barncombe will remain in their desks for the present!

Mabel Cunliffe, appointed to the post of Fourth Form mistress at Morcove School, stood beside her own desk, watching the effect of her order.

Eagerly those to whom the words meant release from afternoon class sprang up to march out. They did so rather hilariously, starting to talk amongst themselves as they neared the door. For Miss Cunliffe was proving no strict disciplinarian with them.

Now that she had attained to the permanent position which was once held by Miss Redgrave, this one-time "temporary" was evidently trying to win popularity.

Only towards those girls to whom the last part of her order applied was she sternness itself.

Whilst the rest of the Form hurried away, Betty Barton and her chums obediently remained in their desks, and from one to another of them Mabel Cunliffe glanced, with a gleam of spite in her handsome eyes.

"I am not ready to go back at once with you to Modena. When I am, I will come and tell you. Meantime—"

She said the rest with a "move-if-you-dare!" look, as she swept from the class-room.

"Phew!" fumed Polly Linton, slamming her folded arms upon the desk. "What will she do next!"

"It weally is," came Paula Creel's plaintive murmur, "too bad of her. The others will be getting tea—tea, just imagine! And heah we are—"

"Likely to stay here, too," muttered Betty

glumly, "as long as she likes to keep us waiting."

"Yes," breathed Helen Craig fiercely. "Oh, Miss Cunliffe knows just how to hit us so that we can't show the mark."

"She make me de-test her more and more all ze day," was the passionate outburst from Naomer Nakara, their dusky scholar from the desert lands of North Africa. "Eef she go on much longer, then I shall—I shall—I shall do something, so!"

"Yowp! You silly cuckoo," wailed Paula, swerving under an excitable swipe of the hand from Naomer. "It's no good going for me, Naomer!"

"I not go for you. I love you. I only show you how I do not love zat—zat how-you-call her? Terror, yes!"

"And Miss Redgrave, all this time, is simply going on from day to day, in Barncombe, out of a job!" It was Madge Minden speaking now, with a great sadness in her subdued voice. "When will Morcove be the same again for us girls!"

"When we have been able to prove Miss Redgrave in the right," Polly answered furiously. "Oh, if only we could get the chance!"

"Yes, wather! Deplovable, going on like this. Downright tywanny, diwected against us geals. Oh, my gwacious, how I want my tea."

Polly commented scathingly:

"Tea! Always howling for tea!"

"I'm not howling, Polly deah; merely deploving the cruel depwivation. Tea nevah fails to wefresh me. Nature's gwreat westower, and all that. Yes, wather—tea!"

"Well, of course, it would be nice," Polly suddenly agreed, changing her tone on purpose to tease the beloved duffer. "With a plate of cream buns, and some muffins—"

"Pway wefwain—"

"Hot buttered muffins; they always go down so well at this time of the year," Polly roguishly went on. "You remember, Paula, before they started the building alterations that meant knocking down the walls of Study 12?"

"Yes, wather; howeverah—"

"The jolly old study teas, Paula! There we were, all round the table; plenty of cakes and pastries; tea freshly made—"

"Dwop it," almost howled the tormented one. "At this wate, geals, we shan't get our tea until long past five."

At this instant, two of the recently dismissed girls showed themselves in the class-room

doorway. They were Cora Grandways and Cissy Norton.

"Oh, you poor things!" jeered Cora. "Don't you want your tea? We are just going upstairs to have ours, in study. Ciss, don't you feel sorry for them—he, he, he!"

The Grandways girl cast a glance along the hall, to make sure that no mistress could hear.

"Poor old crocodile! Ha, ha, ha!"

This was a twitting allusion to the "two-by-two" fashion in which Miss Cunliffe always made the Modena girls walk in town.

"Left, right—left, right; pick 'em up there!" chuckled Cora, causing Cissy to snigger.

In an enraged manner Polly suddenly snatched up a lesson book and hurled it across the room. Cora dodged aside in ample time, and gave her mocking laugh.

"Missed me! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Corwa Gwandways," Paula rose up in her desk to say, with that never-failing politeness of hers, "will you kindly wuk away!"

"No, we won't kindly run away, will we, Ciss? Must stay and see the grand march past. Left, right—left, right; two by two, girls! No talking there! Or you won't have any of Mother Mackay's porridge for breakfast. Ha, ha!"

This time the jeering allusion was to the Scotch landlady who ran the boarding-house where Betty & Co. were quartered.

Cora had not done yet. She had a rich vein of remarks to draw upon, for the purpose of annoying the detained girls. But now, as she began again, with her wide grin, up rose Betty & Co. in threatening manner. They made a rush, before which Cora and Cissy fled, shrieking.

Or rather, those two girls flashed about to dart away, but the first step or so found them blundering into—Miss Cunliffe!

She had nothing to say to the couple, but accepted their flustered apologies with a feeble smile. Bringing her eyes to bear upon Betty & Co., she demanded angrily:

"What's this!"

"We—"

"Why are you out of your places?"

"We weren't going to stand their cheek," Betty stated, for self and friends. "It is bad enough—"

"What is bad enough?"

"To be kept back like this!"

"Yes, wather! Downwight—"

"Shame!" was the word several of the girls used, as with one voice.

"For such impudence," Miss Cunliffe said, with quiet ferocity, "you will all do a page of French this evening. Now, form two! Get your things on and proceed to the 'bus.'"

The tyrannical mistress walked away, and so Cora and Cissy were able to creep halfway down the lowest flight of stairs, to lean over the banisters and make further game of the luckless girls.

"Left, right—left right; that's the way! Give my love to the Mackay, won't you?" Cora said. "And don't forget to do that French!"

Betty & Co. wore expressions of grim fortitude as they went out to the private motor-bus and took their seats. How long? How much longer were they to be forced to put up with such undeserved hardship?

It was some extensive rebuilding at Morcove School which had necessitated their being boarded out in Barncombe. Until the alterations and additions were completed, they could hardly hope to return to the normal life as boarders in the

school. And, even then—even when they did return, would it make much difference?

The life at Modena was not the hardship. It had been jolly for them, whilst they were under the charge of Miss Redgrave. The trouble was that they had been singled out by Miss Cunliffe for her secret tyranny, and that tyranny might be expected to continue, even when Modena was a thing of the past.

"If only—oh, if only there could have been a hope of Miss Redgrave's returning to her duties in the school! But she was gone, and gone for ever, it seemed. All Morcove knew that now. It had been called "suspended from duty"; but in one word it had meant—the "sack."

There was no happy chatter amongst the girls as the bus ran them towards the town. Miss Cunliffe occupied her usual corner seat, and the girls had her cold eyes upon them every other minute.

Now and then Polly would saucily look across at Paula, who was evidently groaning inwardly. Naomer, hungry for the overdue tea, furtively searched her frock-pocket for a chance chocolate. She found one in the folds of her handkerchief, and by means of the handkerchief she furtively conveyed it to her lips.

As for Betty Barton, when her hand presently stole to her jacket pocket, it was for quite a different reason.

Betty was feeling for a certain letter which she had written during the day—a letter that it would have been fatal for Miss Cunliffe to pounce upon. That was why it had been impossible to write it at the boarding-house. Betty had felt lucky when she got half an hour to herself in the school library. There was no Study 12 now; alas, with all its chances for privacy.

Reaching Barncombe High Street, the 'bus purred along to the boarding-house, near which—as Betty remembered—there was a pillar-box. Miss Cunliffe marched them all into the house, then left them to get their outdoor things off, she herself mounting to her room.

"Half a sec.," whispered Betty to Polly and the others, and out into the street she flashed again.

In a few moments she was at the pillar-box. One last glance she gave the addressed envelope, and then—flick! It was gone through the slot.

Even as Betty shot the letter into the pillar-box, however, she saw a face at one of the lower-floor front windows of the boarding-house. Miss Cunliffe!

"What were you doing out there, just now, Betty?" the mistress demanded, half a minute later, meeting the Form captain in the Modena hall.

"Posting a letter."

"To whom?"

"I don't see why I should tell you, Miss Cunliffe."

"Girl!"

"Well, I don't choose to tell you, so there!"

"Come back—come back this instant! Why couldn't you post that letter in the school-box? Was it because you were afraid of the address being read?"

"I shan't say!"

Miss Cunliffe went one step further than in her cruelty towards the Study 12 girls. She dealt Betty a sounding slap on the head, and then gave the girl such a violent push as sent her reeling.

On the Way to School.

"A LETTER for you, miss!"

"Oh, thank you."

Ruth Redgrave's pleasant disposition had not suffered by the cruel, undeserved blow that had befallen her lately. Her manner was as cheery as ever as she took the note which her landlady had brought in.

The pale sunshine of a morning in late autumn was upon the tranquil little town of Barncombe. Ruth was close to the window of her bed-sitting-room as she received the letter, and in the strong light her face could be seen to turn very pale.

A schoolgirl's handwriting on the envelope! Betty's, surely!

Eagerly opening out the letter, she read these lines:

"Modena,
"High Street,
"Barncombe.

"Dear Miss Redgrave,—My chums and I want to let you know how sorry we are for you, and how we miss you.

"It gave us a big shock when we saw you out walking in Barncombe yesterday. At the same time, it seemed a relief that you were still so near the old school. We all hope that you will remain in Barncombe; and—oh, if only you could come back to Morcove some day!

"There is a lot that I dare not write about. You will understand. But as Polly for one has said, it would be no use writing this letter simply to say how we feel for you, because you must have taken that for granted.

"So I am going to add this: My chums and I have made up our minds to do our very best to get things righted for you. The real truth of that affair has never come out, and if only we can discover how it was that you came in for the blame, it will make a world of difference. We will do our very best.

"In great haste, and with best wishes,

"Your old scholar,
"BETTY."

The eyes of the ex-mistress were misty when she raised them from this plain yet earnestly friendly letter.

Betty, to have written like that on behalf of the entire batch of chums! No mere expression of that sorrow which had been so evident amongst the girls on the day that she, Ruth Redgrave, quitted the dear old school; the letter meant far, far more than that. The determination to right a great wrong—if only it were possible!

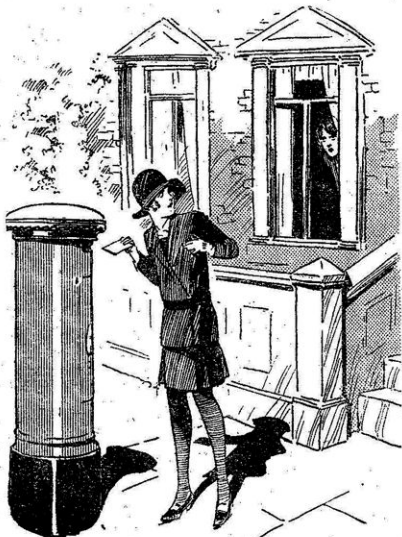
She glanced again at the note.

"The real truth of that affair has never come out—"

How certainly Betty had put it! Well, she and her chums were not wrong in being so certain. There really had been a cruel concealment of the truth, a most artful misleading of the head-mistress. But whether the facts of the case would ever be made known—ah, who could say!

With the best will in the world, what could Betty and the rest hope to accomplish, when she, Ruth Redgrave, was herself so helpless?

The injustice that had been done her might never be set right. In Mabel Cunliffe, Miss Redgrave had an inveterate enemy, a girl with a grudge, and that girl had known how to scheme until her hated rival had been ousted. And now that the scheme had been successful, how could one say if it would ever be undone?



UNDER OBSERVATION. Even as Betty shot the letter into the pillar-box, she saw a face at one of the boarding-house windows. Miss Cunliffe was watching her!

A clock on the mantelpiece "tinged" the half-hour. There arose in Ruth Redgrave's mind a thought of all that half-past eight in the morning meant for the girls who used to be her special charges. At Morcove School a boisterous jumping up from "brekker," making her glad to see them all so happy-hearted. Were they as happy now?

And then, the girls who were at present quartered in the town; this was the time for them to be preparing for the run to school in the private 'bus which fetched them every morning.

In a few minutes now the very girls who were responsible for this heartfelt letter would be going off again to Morcove. It made her long dearly to make for High Street simply to see them pass.

Nor was that longing one which Ruth Redgrave could resist.

Suddenly she passed from the cheap room which she had rented to put on her things and leave the house. A short walk along two or three other roads of villas, similar to the one in which she lived, and she had the High Street's pavement under her feet.

Immediately, too, she saw the 'bus standing at the kerb opposite Modena, and the girls coming out of the boarding-house.

Two by two they were—petty tyranny that it was, to make the girls cross the pavement like that! If Miss Somerfield knew— But there, how was the headmistress likely to find out how her proper demand for discipline was being made the excuse for irksome, humiliating restraint?

The girls themselves would never complain. They would "stick it," if only because they knew how artfully Mabel Cunliffe could always trump up some excuse for the special severity. They knew her by now!

"But they do not know all," Ruth added to

herself, as she stood pensively watching the 'bus receive its party of schoolgirl passengers. "I could have told them, as I was so greatly tempted to tell them when first things began to go wrong. But I prefer not to fight Mabel Cunliffe with the same unfair weapons which she has used!"

Until this morning the ex-mistress had thought it best to avoid, if possible, any encounter with the Morcovians. Now, however, she felt she owed it to them to be on hand as they passed.

She could not write to them; that would be unwise. Mabel Cunliffe was the sort not to scruple to confiscate any letter that came for the girls, addressed in her handwriting. So there must be just a quick, grateful look for the girls as the 'bus ran them along the street.

It was coming now, and Ruth nerved herself for the ordeal that the next few moments would mean for her.

As the 'bus drew level, she found herself under the gaze of Mabel Cunliffe, that girl's handsome eyes staring through one of the glass panes of the 'bus. A merciless stare, still charged with undying enmity!

In the same instant Ruth Redgrave beheld several of the girls' faces, and they were—ah, how different in expression from that vindictive countenance! Betty, Polly, Paula, Madge—those four girls at least she glimpsed clearly, giving her a startled look. Remembering the letter, she let her own look become one of great gratitude. She even made a faint gesture, implying heartfelt thanks.

In the 'bus Paula, for one, was so excited that she forgot the presence of the tyrant.

"Bai Jove——"

"Paula Creel, you are talking!"

"Yes, wather!"

"You know I don't allow talking on the way to school. Fifty lines this evening!"

Having snapped out this drastic sentence, Mabel Cunliffe closed her lips in a thin line, making her handsome face look harder than ever. The girls remained gloomily silent until the 'bus unexpectedly stopped in the High Street, outside a garage and cycle-shop.

This surprise was too much for Naomer.

"Ooo, we have ze break-down! We not able to——"

"Naomer, you are talking! Fifty lines this evening!"

Then the chauffeur came round to the door at the back of the 'bus.

"I have to call at this garage to pick up something for Miss Somerfield's car."

"Very well," Mabel Cunliffe responded carelessly. "But how long will you be?"

"A few minutes perhaps, miss. The job wasn't ready when I called on my way to Modena just now."

The Form-mistress merely nodded; but after the chauffeur had gone into the garage, she took it into her head to quit the 'bus.

"Whilst we are delayed like this, I may as well look in at the bookshop. I could do with one or two gift-books. You girls—behave whilst I am gone!"

She stepped away, and even if there had been an injunction about "no talking," it would have gone by the board now. It was not in human nature that Betty & Co. should sit like mutes when the Terror was away.

Naomer instantly began some gleeful chatter with Paula; but Polly, strange to say, did not seize on this opportunity for some fun.

"I say—this garage!" she broke out excitedly. "Do you think it would be any use one of us jumping out and—asking a few questions, about—you know what? If Miss Cunliffe did hire a bicycle that night, it may have been from this place!"

Then, impetuous as ever, Polly jumped up before there had been time for Betty or the others to answer.

"I'm going to ask!"

"But——"

"It's a chance we may not get again," was the madcap's ejaculation as she alighted. "Leave it to me!"

Two seconds later, she was entering the garage shop, which was deserted. The chauffeur and a mechanic had gone into the adjoining yard, to see how that job for the headmistress' car was progressing. Polly struck a bell upon the counter—

This imperative summons brought the proprietor himself upon the scene.

"Morning!" smiled Polly, just as if she had been waiting with the sweetest patience. "I want to ask, do you do anything about hiring out push-bikes? Not that I want one now, but——"

"Oh, yes, miss, we keep a few! Any time you like——"

"Thanks! I thought this seemed the most likely shop. It's where our new mistress, Miss Cunliffe, has hired a machine one or two evenings, isn't it?"

"You mean the young lady that is at Modena?"

"That's right! Staying there whilst we girls have to be boarded away from the school!"

"Miss Cunliffe has hired a machine from us, certainly," the proprietor stated, to the secret delight of Polly. "She had one out several evenings running a while back."

"I thought so," Polly nodded serenely.

"Which reminds me," added the garage owner, scratching a cheek, "she didn't return the pump along with the bike. I meant to mention it. Would you tell her, miss?"

"Oh—er—eh—she may be here in a minute. She is only a few doors off, at the bookshop," Polly said, fading towards the pavement. "Thanks, Mr. White!"

Back to the crowded 'bus she darted, bursting to tell the others what her inquiry had elicited. It is doubtful if Polly had ever before looked quite so thrilled, so overjoyed. And then——

"Polly Linton! What are you doing out of your seat?"

She turned round, the glad look banished.

"I—I have been asking about hiring a bicycle."

"You girls will not be hiring any bicycles," the Terror announced, with her bleak smile. "Time to think of cycle rides when I am less displeased with you. Get to your seat, Polly—and a hundred lines for leaving it without permission!"

A trifling penalty, Polly thought it, considering the object she had gained. The 'bus went on again at last, and there she sat, along with her chums, unable to tell them!

But oh, the excitement there would be when she could!

Their Chance—At Last!

IN class that morning, Miss Cunliffe suddenly held up a couple of charming, gilt-edged volumes.

"I have one or two gift books here, girls," she announced sweetly. "I intend to give away one each week to the girl who, in my opinion, is the best behaved!"

Betty and Polly nudged each other. Under her breath, Paula said:
"Howwows!"

For the chums knew now with what motive the new mistress had visited the bookshop. Prizes for best behaviour! Otherwise, playing for popularity!

Even the Form in general felt both amused and a little scornful. Other mistresses had never held out special inducements of this kind to get Moroccoans to behave. It was a faulty system that had long since fallen into disuse.

At "break," Betty had an immediate comment to make upon Miss Cunliffe's "latest."

"We know, of course, who will get the first book—Cora Grandways!"

"As likely as not," grinned Polly.

"Dweadful!" groaned Paula. "And Miss Cunliffe is the one who accused Miss Wedgwave of trying to make favouwites!"

"Well, bother books for best behaviour," Polly resumed impatiently. "I've got something to tell you. Let's get away somewhere, where we can talk."

They were already in the open air, and it was a simple matter to stroll to a more remote part of the spacious grounds, where Polly could resume guardedly:

"When I spoke to Mr. White at the garage this morning, I had great luck, girls?"

"You did?"

"Bai Joye! Gweat wejoic—"

"Listen!" Polly rushed on softly. "You know what it may mean for Miss Redgrave if we can prove that someone else was mistaken for her that night the trouble occurred with Cora and Cissy?"

Betty and one or two others nodded eagerly.

"Yes, Polly," exclaimed the Form captain, "Miss Redgrave was dismissed because it appeared that she did not report Cora and Cissy for being out of bounds, although she saw them creeping back into the schoolhouse. Miss Redgrave denied that she saw them, but—"

"Cora and Cissy, when they owned to have been seen by someone, declared that it was Miss Redgrave," broke in Polly. "Well, we say that it must have been somebody else—and so it was! What's more, we weren't far out in our suspicion. It was Miss Cunliffe herself!"

"Bai Joye!"

"Must have been!" insisted Polly. "We know how easily Miss Cunliffe could have been mistaken for Miss Redgrave—same age and build—"

"And Miss Cunliffe was away from Modena that evening!" chimed in Helen Craig. "That we all know!"

"Let me come to the latest," Polly said, with an amateur detective's chuckle of triumph. "I learned from Mr. White at the garage that Miss C. did hire out a machine several evenings running. So there you are! Why should she want a bike if it was not for the journey from Barncombe to Morocco?"

This was received with impressed looks by Polly's eager listeners.

"We are getting on," Betty exclaimed jubilantly. "That's something, Polly!"

"Yes, wather! Geals—"

"But it isn't everything, worse luck!" grimaced Polly. "We've got as far as this. Shall we get any farther? It is not so good enough just to prove that Miss Cunliffe was out of doors on the night, and hired a bike on the night. We have jolly well got to prove that she used the bike to ride to Morocco—"

"And hide in the grounds!" came Tess' quick rejoinder. "Bother it, I was beginning to feel that Miss Redgrave was saved!"

"Yes, wather!"

"Never mind!" Polly's got us somewhere," Madge said, in her own quiet way. "I don't wonder you came out of that garage looking so joyful, Polly. It was enough—"

"Seemed good enough at the time. But—oh, well," Polly shrugged with desperate optimism, "we may—"

"Sh!"

And there was the Terror again, pretending to have come upon them by surprise.

"Why aren't you girls with the rest of the Form?"

"We really can't say!" Betty laughed.

"Why stand about like this, talking?"

"Why let us exist at all?" Polly exploded fiercely. "And now, how many lines for that?"

"Five hundred," was the crushing reply. "And you will do them by next Saturday night!"

The mistress waved to them to go and mingle with the other girls, whilst she herself lingered at that quiet spot, watching the workmen who, at a little distance, were busy with the bricklaying.

Betty & Co., after going a short distance, looked back. They, too, could see the builders' men going up and down ladders, or working amongst the scaffolding which draped that part of the great schoolhouse. They could even see, high aloft, the inside of dear old Study 12—now a study no more, since its outer wall had been knocked away.

Suddenly Betty whispered to the others.

"Girls, look at Mabel Cunliffe now—standing. I should say, just where that figure stood that night, which Cora and Cissy mistook for Miss Redgrave."

"It would be somewhere there, yes," murmured Madge; "for we know that they were creeping towards the scaffolding to get back into the schoolhouse by means of the ladders. What an artful dodge of theirs that was!"

Just then Cora and Cissy came sauntering up, and the impudent grins on their faces told how little they were suffering for the heinous escapade. Miss Somerfield had "gated" them for the rest of the term, but it was pretty obvious that they were not serving their sentence, simply because Miss Cunliffe had it in her power to grant them indulgence, unbeknown to the headmistress.

"Two by two, girls!" Cora twitted the chums, as she and Cissy minced by. "And no talking. Crocodiles don't talk!"

"But donkeys bray a lot," observed Polly.

Cora stopped dead.

"Who's a donkey?"

"As plainly as possible," said Polly blandly, "I said that you are."

Miss Cunliffe was approaching, so Cora contented herself with making a face at the laughing chums. As the latter walked on, the Grandways girl nudged Cissy, hinting that she meant to "get round" the new mistress.

"Aren't they getting on fast with the extensions, Miss Cunliffe!" Cora was exclaiming silkily, a couple of seconds later.

"Yes; and soon there will be no more ladders just there, for girls to climb up and down!" Mabel Cunliffe responded, with a mock-stern look that left the two girls agrin.

"It was pretty awful of us," Cora owned, darningly looking the mistress in the eyes and laughing. "But haven't we been punished enough, Miss Cunliffe?"

"I don't know that you have! Gated for the rest of the term—that was Miss Somerfield's decree."

"But you might make allowance again, next Saturday," pleaded Cora sweetly. "Considering what good girls we are being!"

"Ask me, when Saturday comes," said the new mistress, smiling indulgently upon both disgraces as she passed on.

"There we are!" exulted Cora, left alone with Cissy. "I tell you, she knows she owes something to us, for the way Miss Redgrave got ousted from the school. If it hadn't been for you and me, Ciss, that would never have happened. We shall get a jaunt, on Saturday, you see!"



A BID FOR POPULARITY. Miss Cunliffe held up a couple of gilt-edged books. "I intend to give one of these books each week to the girl who is best behaved!" she said. Betty and Polly nudged each other, and Paula said, "Howwows!"

Nor did this misrepresent Miss Cunliffe's state of mind towards the pair. Full well she was realising that they, by their disgraceful escapade, had served her secret purpose admirably.

As much as she dared do so, in front of the Form, she wanted to favour them now. They had been on her side from the very first, even as Betty Barton and the other Modena girls had been openly on the side of—Miss Redgrave!

But the mere fact that Betty & Co. had the will to help Miss Redgrave, if only they could enrage the new mistress against the girls. That afternoon, at the close of school, she joined them in the return journey to Modena, in as harsh a frame of mind as ever.

Now, however, fate was to cause a turn of events that would force Mabel Cunliffe to abandon her tyranny for a few hours at least.

Once again the chauffeur pulled into the kerb outside Mr. White's garage, this time to hand in a note—probably Miss Somerfield's cheque for the recent job. Mr. White, as he received the missive, was suddenly reminded of something he wished to say to the mistress riding with the girls. He came out to the kerb.

"I was going to ask you, miss; you haven't by

any chance found the pump belonging to that bicycle you hired?"

"Oh—er—no—"

"It was missing, you remember, the last time you hired the machine," the garage proprietor said affably. "If you do come across it—thank you!"

And bowing, he returned to his office.

In her corner of the private bus, Miss Cunliffe was biting a lip during the short run to the other end of the High Street. The girls noticed her frowning looks, but attributed them to resentment at Mr. White's being so fussy about a mere half-crown cycle-pump.

She was irritable with them when they got indoors, but seemed too bothered about something to carry on the actual campaign of harshness. More surprising still, shortly after tea, when the early twilight was giving place to dark night, she suddenly announced that she was going for a walk.

No sooner had the street door below closed behind her, than the girl's first-floor sitting-room became the scene of great gaiety. If Paula had not been so quick to cast herself into an easy chair, Naomer would have tumbled the elegant duffer into it. For Naomer dashed at Paula with all the violence of long-suppressed spirits.

"Ooo, now we can be happy, queek, queek!"

"Yes, wather! Gweat wejoic—Ow, careful, Naomer; don't wiggle, you wascal!" bared Paula, now that the dusky one was demanding to be nursed. "Let it be a time of wepose, Naomer, our brief freedom from that tewwop!"

"So she has gone for a walk!" remarked Polly, suddenly sitting back from the table reflectively. "Does that mean she is off to Morcove again, by bike?"

"Surely not?" exclaimed Helen. "Why should she? Now that she is Form-mistress, she has nothing to gain by watching out for more girls breaking bounds!"

"Is it a trap for us?" wondered Betty. "The same as we thought she was laying for us, those other evenings. We were mistaken then; but this time—"

"No! It isn't a trap for us; it is—it means—oh, I've got it!" was Polly's sudden outcry, whilst she jumped up in the greatest excitement. "And why didn't I think of it before!"

"Polly?"

"Bai Jove!"

"The missing bicycle pump!" were the words with which Polly electrified her chums. "That's worrying her—and why? Simply because she fears it may be found—in the school grounds!"

The others voiced an impressed:

"Oh!" Paula, adding her own gasping:

"Bai Jove! Geals—"

"You do see, don't you?" rushed on Polly. "If the pump dropped from its clips when she was at Morcove, that night, and if it should be found."

"By one of us, for instance!" interjected Betty.

"My goodness, if only we could find it."

"We must!" jerked out Polly. "Look here,

I'm going—are you others coming? I mean it; I'm off now!"

"But—"

"Only think!" headstrong Polly paused to say, on the way to the door. "This on top of what we found out this morning!"

"What you found out, Polly—"

"Oh, we are all one in this. I only did the asking, at the garage! Anyhow, we must decide

at once—at once! She'll be on her way to Morcove as soon as she can get hold of a bicycle. It's up to us to go after her, on hired machines; keep watch on her—see if she finds the pump! If she does—"

"Bai Jove!"

"Breaking bounds; that's what it means," Betty said gravely. "Still—"

"Oh, Betty," implored Polly wildly. "Don't put it like that! Think of Miss Redgrave! And this is our one great chance! Look here, I'm going, anyhow! So, are any of you girls coming with me?"

And, as with one voice, they answered:

"Yes!"

Detectives All!

"WE are going," Betty affirmed calmly. "We know all about the rules against breaking bounds and all that. We would never do it, except for such a reason. If ever there was a time for taking a bit of liberty, it's now."

"If you say so, it's all right," exclaimed Helen. "We have no one we can ask!"

"I do say so," nodded the Form captain, unflinchingly. "We have to choose between sticking to a rule and failing Miss Redgrave. As things stand, I look upon it as up to us!"

"Then come on!" urged Polly, whipping open the door.

But in the end they made the wise decision that all should not go. Apart from the fact that hiring bicycles for so many might be impossible at such an hour, numbers would perhaps be more of a hindrance than a help.

There was some further talk, rapid and decisive. Four seemed to be the right number, and it was settled that the quartette should consist of Betty, Polly, Helen, and Madge.

Their hats and coats hastily donned, out of the boarding-house hurried these four girls, and keeping for caution's sake to the side street, made for the garage. In a few minutes they came cautiously down a byway, which would bring them out upon the High Street once more, quite close to the garage. At the corner, the others let Betty go before them, to do a bit of scouting. After her first peep into the main street, she came nipping back.

"I've seen her!" was Betty's jubilant whisper. "She was just coming out of White's, with a bike!"

Polly did a little caper of delight.

"We are in time, then!"

"Yes," whispered Helen, "and now, let's hope the luck still holds."

"If only it will hold!" breathed Madge, with tremendous fervour. "Could a much greater thing turn upon such a little thing as this? Miss Redgrave's whole future to be saved, if only we have a bit of luck to-night."

"I say, it's all right now, so come on!"

That was headstrong Polly again. Boldly, she strode down to the corner that gave on to High Street, the others with her.

Bunched together for an instant at that corner, they looked up the street. There was someone riding away in the direction of Morcove on a bicycle—a young lady

There she went, the audacious mistress, whose grudge against poor Ruth Redgrave had cost the girls so much! But now, perhaps, the hour was

at hand when she was to meet her match in the girls over whom she had tyrannised. The reckoning hour for her, at last—perhaps!

Promptly the excited four moved along the pavement to the garage. No one was on hand when the girls entered the well-lighted shop, but a dab at the bell on the counter brought forward an overalled mechanic.

"Good-evening," Betty began, with enforced calmness. "Can you let us have four push-bikes for a couple of hours or so?"

"Four, miss? I'm not quite sure," said the mechanic. "Because I've just let one out to a young lady—your mistress, I think, at the school!"

"Quite likely!" Betty assented blandly. "Well, do your best for us, won't you?"



SIGHTED! Suddenly Polly gave an exclamation of excitement. "There she goes!" she said. "Riding fast!" It certainly was Miss Cunliffe immediately ahead.

"I will!"

And he did, so that soon all four girls emerged with the means to follow Miss Cunliffe to Morcove. Mounting, they rode away, and soon the lamplit High Street had given place to the open, nightbound road, with pitch-dark country on either side.

Not a word was spoken now. Such a disaster would it be to all their hopes if they unwittingly overtook Miss Cunliffe on the dark road, they felt they dare not speak.

The very purr of the tyres made far too much noise, soft though it was, for their liking. One never knew! At any moment the person riding ahead of them might have to get down to fiddle with her machine.

Of a sudden, as they topped a gentle rise and had the highway falling away for some distance before them, they saw a small, faint glow of light traversing the road down there.

"There she goes!" panted Polly, softly. "Riding fast!"

"Yes, but we have been getting on too fast ourselves," was Betty's uneasy rejoinder. "Our lamps—if she should look round!"

"Yet we ought to keep after her for all we are worth," said Helen softly. "What about turning out the lamps, leaving the machines, and going the rest of the way on foot?"

"It would be better, don't you think?" submitted Madge.

Betty and Polly gave approving nods instantly. "That's the idea," fumed Polly. "It's not far now, and we can run. I'd run until I dropped for the sake of what we stand the chance of doing to-night!"

Betty turned out her cycle-lamp, and the others promptly followed suit. So far, at any rate, they were all right. As to that they were agreed, feeling sure that Miss Cunliffe would not have been still riding on as she was if she had already glimpsed their lamps.

Probably she had never once looked behind her since she started away from the town. Why should she have looked back, since she could have no idea that she was under suspicion?

But such reasoning, plausible though it seemed to the girls, was at fault! It did not take account of one factor in the case—Miss Cunliffe's guilty frame of mind!

Twice already she had cast a nervous glance behind her, as she steadily rode towards Morcove; and twice had she glimpsed the starry light of cycle lamps a good way back.

The first time she had tried to flout the sudden fear that she was being followed. After all, this open road between the town and the school was not limited to persons belonging to the school!

But when she saw the far-back lights a second time, she found her apprehension increased. True, all sorts of people made use of the road—but how seldom! And this was not the holiday season. A dark night in late autumn! Why, then, should a batch of four cyclists be riding out to lonely Morcove?

Were they Morcove girls—seniors who had been given leave to run into town since tea? That seemed the most likely thing; but she felt she had better make certain.

"It won't take more than a few minutes," she told herself, at the same time pulling up to alight. "Let them get in front of me, anyway!"

Wheeling her machine off the road, she turned out the lamp. There was a bush against which she could lean the bicycle, and with the machine thus disposed of, she was free to take her stand in a safe lurking place, close to the road.

Meantime, four other discarded bicycles were leaning one against another in a clump of bushes, back there on the brow of the low hill. Their owners were footing it warily the rest of the way to Morcove, and again all four tongues were silent.

For a couple of hundred yards they went on like this, steadfastly. And at every step they were drawing nearer, nearer to the person lying in wait for them!

Suddenly Betty exclaimed guardedly: "Do you know, I don't like this idea of our carrying on along this road. Supposing she has glimpsed our lamps? We had to keep them burning for as long as we were riding the bikes. Supposing she has got down to—"

"Just what I was beginning to feel—uneasy!"

muttered Helen. "Can't we steer clear of the road?"

The question was not debated for even so much as a moment. Then and there all four girls diverted their cautious steps, making a big detour over the open waste land to the right of the road.

Nor did they again set foot upon the highway whilst still bearing towards the distant school-house, whose many lit-up windows shone brightly in the night.

Over rough ground trudged the girls, seeing no sign of the one whom they had felt called upon to follow. Whether they were in front of her now, or still behind her, they could not surmise. But whatever the case, they pushed on with all the speed possible over such rough going.

So, presently, Betty and her three chums reached the boundary hedge of Morcove School.

Without a sound they managed to wriggle through the hedge at a point where there was a thin place. Then they crept through a shrubbery and across a large plot of grass, the darkness enshrouding them.

Foot by foot they neared that part of the building which was at present disfigured by so much scaffolding. They intended waiting and watching just here, and so at last they took their stand together, in the shelter of some bushes.

Time passed, however, and Betty & Co. were still without a sight of Miss Cunliffe. What did it mean?

Was she here in the grounds, unbeknown to them, or had they got here in advance of her, by all these minutes? Had something occurred to cause her to abandon the search to-night? How long were they to remain on watch?

Questions, these, perplexing enough to the four girls, hating their task as they did, and yet knowing it to be of such vital importance! Madge had said right. It was now or never, surely, if Miss Redgrave was to be saved from the ruin that had befallen her career.

Polly spoke in the most cautious of whispers: "Let one or two of us take a prowling round. She may be here all the time!"

"We'll all scatter," agreed Betty, in a guarded tone. "But for goodness' sake, let's be most careful!"

Needless caution, if only they could have known it! The danger of disaster did not exist at that spot. Fate had decreed that Miss Cunliffe was not to be caught by them in the act of looking for the bicycle pump, in such incriminating circumstances.

At this very moment she was cycling back to Barncombe, too crafty to feel like running the risk of making that search to-night. If, as she suddenly felt convinced, some of the Modena girls had come after her, she was going to catch them, not they her!

At the garage she calmly handed over her machine and paid for the hire, inquiring carelessly:

"You have hired out three or four machines to some of my girls since I was here last?"

"Well—yes, miss—"

"Oh, it's quite all right," she smiled, realising how reluctantly the mechanic was admitting that other machines had been hired. "I know all about it!"

And so, forth into the High Street again she passed, to go on foot to Modena, there to await those girls' return!

Waiting—For What ?

"HARK, girls! Quarter to eight striking!"
 "Yes, wather," Paula Creel uneasily answered Tess Trelawney's anxious comment on the flight of time. "Bai Jove, I do wondah haow those geals are getting on!"
 "I'd give anything—anything," exclaimed Dolly Delane, "to have them turn up presently, triumphant!"

"The wejoiings would be twemendous, yes, wather," nodded Paula, beaming with anticipation of the longed-for triumph. "For us geals to be able to go to Morcove-to-mowwow, to weport the whole mattah, bai Jove! Miss Wed-gwawe wighted after all—"

"Ooo, yes!" interjected Naomer, with all the pathos of her emotional disposition. "Eet not fair that we have to go on like this!"

"Cwuel injustice, yes, wather," sighed Paula; "but mind you, no blame to Miss Somerfield. Wather not, bai Jove! That's the wretched thing about it all—"

"Maddening," muttered Tess, restlessly getting up to go to the front window and look round the edge of the blind. "Well, the longer the girls are kept out, the more hopeful I suppose it becomes, really! It must mean that they followed Miss Cunliffe—"

"Yes, wather! And so let us twust, geals, that pweently there will be gwat wejoiic— Yes, Tess, what is it?"

"My goodness!" gasped out that girl, suddenly backing away from the window. "She's down there now—just coming in!"

"What!"

"Howwows! Geals—"

"Miss Cunliffe has come back, and the others haven't! She'll want to know where they are! She—"

Tr-r-ring, ring! went the door-bell, and that sound in itself left the heart-in-mouth girls more aghast than ever.

"Dweadful, dweadful," Paula fairly groaned, getting up from the couch. "Geals, what are we to say?"

"Nothing!" Tess decided instantly. "Isn't that best, Dolly? Refuse—"

"We will wrefuse, yes, wather! Wild horses shall not dwag the twuth fwom me," Paula said, with a fine spirit. "But, those poor geals! Oh, my goodness gwacious, this is downwight dweadful; a catastwophe of the gwreatest magnitude, what?"

Nor could the others smile, even wanly, at Paula's way of putting it. In a quaking state they stood, hearing Miss Cunliffe coming upstairs. A moment more and the sitting-room door opened, and they were under her gleaming eyes.

"Where are the rest?"

There was no answer, and instantly she stamped a foot.

"Betty and the other three girls—where are they? But I know!"

"Then you don't really need to be told—"

"Tess Trelawney, are you trying to be so insolent that I must report you to the headmistress? Have a care! Be very careful, all of you! A thing like this—four of the others, out of bounds, with your assistance, doubtless. I can have you expelled for this!"

She came away from the door, erect and plainly furious. With swift, enraged movements, she removed her outdoor things and tossed them down, then smoothed her hair.

"After the strict orders that have been given—

those girls, and one of them the Form captain! Very well. Wait till they return!"

And she sat down.

One by one the dismayed girls resumed their seats. There was nothing to do now but to wait for Betty and the others to come in!

The moments ticked by, growing into minutes. Five, ten, fifteen minutes—twenty. Still this tense wait went on, the room as silent as a court of law when the verdict is being awaited.

In her heart, Paula for one was simply weeping for the chums who had risked so much—all for nothing! She might be the duffer of the Form, but she did know how to appreciate the courage and cleverness of others, and what failure meant. In this case, perhaps—expulsion!

For, what could Betty and her hapless companions plead, in extenuation? How to get Miss Somerfield or any one else to listen to a charge against the Form-mistress that was founded on pure theory!

At last—at long last there came that ring at the bell, below, which heralded the appearance of the adventurous four. Miss Cunliffe retained her seat until the doomed quartette had mounted the stairs and were entering the room. Then she stood up.

"Past nine, and you are only just back!" she began, pointing to the clock on the mantelpiece. "You refuse, I suppose, to say where you have been?"

"Yes," answered Betty calmly. "I and my chums are not going to say anything; but—"

"It has come to this, has it," Miss Cunliffe said fiercely. "You dare me to do my worst? You think you can go before the headmistress, in the morning, and yet get off, because of some trumped-up excuse that you will not reveal to me to-night?" She laughed. "You are making a big mistake! Miss Somerfield does not listen to tittle-tattle. She does not wish her scholars to break bounds, to play at amateur detective!"

"Well!" Polly herself laughed back, at that; "you seem to have a pretty good idea, Miss Cunliffe—"

"Oh, I understand!" was the shrugged interruption. "You four took upon yourselves to spy upon me to-night, hoping to find out something that would damage me in Miss Somerfield's eyes. You hired bicycles from that garage? I hope you have taken them back," she added drily, "and paid for them?"

"We have," said Betty, with a serenity which rather shook Miss Cunliffe's strong nerve. "We have taken back something else—the missing bicycle-pump!"

The words, although spoken so quietly, gave the mistress a shock which struck her back a step or two. Her lips parted, but she seemed unable to speak. There would have been dead silence in the room, only Paula suddenly gave a joyful cry.

"What! Oh, bai Jove—oh, gwat wejoiings! Betty—Polly—all of you—"

"We found the pump—yes," Polly said, with a sudden smile of triumph. "Just where we expected you, Miss Cunliffe, to come looking for it to-night—outside the school grounds, close to the boundary hedge!"

"In the dead grass," added Helen, "where you must have stood your bicycle, that night!"

"And so, we have found you out; we have proved it against you!" Betty continued the accusing cries that were causing Miss Cunliffe to stare aghast. "Mr. White, at the garage, is a

witness that you lost the pump that night—the night you went to Morcove School, to lie in wait for Cora and Cissy and let them mistake you for Miss Redgrave!"

For a long moment there was silence, the girls all keeping their eyes upon Miss Cunliffe, daring her to deny it—if she could! And then, suddenly, she moistened her pale, dry lips, and spoke.

"Mr. White is merely a witness, if necessary, that I lost that pump on the night you mention. It is perfectly true, by a mere coincidence, I was out for a ride that night. But neither Mr. White nor anyone else can witness that you found that pump to-night anywhere near Morcove School! There is only your word for it—the false account on which you have agreed amongst yourselves—"

"Nothing of the sort!" struck in Betty vehemently. "There is a witness to prove where the pump was found, in that tell-tale spot. The witness is here in this house!"

Even as Miss Cunliffe shrank again under this fresh blow at her effrontery, Polly whipped about and opened the sitting-room door.

"Now, Ethel Courtway—it's your turn!" she cried.

Then, as much to the astonishment of Paula, Naomer, Tess, and Dolly, as to the amazement of Miss Cunliffe, there stepped into the room Morcove's own Head Girl.

With dramatic suddenness she was across the threshold of the room—this tall, dignified senior who, since the dismissal of Miss Redgrave, had been appointed to help Miss Cunliffe with the Fourth Form. They had been sharing a good deal of the work in the last few days; but there was little to suggest the friendly colleagues about either of them now.

The mistress herself was glaring resentfully. As for Ethel Courtway, in her well-bred, sporting way, she managed to convey a good deal of scorn, without looking malicious.

"So you have—taken a hand in it all?" panted Mabel Cunliffe, with desperate derision. "Those four girls have come to you with some lying tale, and then taken you to where they had dropped a cycle-pump, to make you believe—"

"Wrong again," interposed Betty. "As a matter of fact, we got nicely caught by Ethel, in the school grounds—"

"And the girls were far from inclined to give account of themselves, too," spoke up Ethel, looking steadily at the mistress. "It was only when I insisted that they must go with me, at once, to the headmistress, that they made a clean breast of everything."

"I like your word for it," sneered Mabel Cunliffe. "What you mean is that they told you about some precious theory in regard to me!"

"They told me that they had broken bounds to follow you, and why they had done that. You call it a 'theory'; but as I listened to what they were bound to tell me, I could see there was something in it all."

"And, like a sport," burst forth Polly admiringly. "Ethel started to help us in our search! She was with us when we found the pump—"

"I was," nodded Morcove's Head Girl impressively. "And when I get back to Morcove, presently, I mean to lay the matter before the headmistress. It can be proved, now, that Miss Redgrave was wrongfully dismissed. What's more, Miss Cunliffe, you yourself caused that wrong to be done—"

But Miss Cunliffe waited to hear no more. As though realising that the game was up, she gave a fierce glare all round, and strode to the door.

Slam!

"Gone—she's gone to her room!" was Betty's joyful cry. "I say, Ethel, you must excuse us—"

"Yes, wather! Bai Jove, such a gweat welief; the triumph of wight over wong, what? Ethel—"

"Ethel! Oh, do say we may run round to Miss Redgrave's lodgings, to tell her!" went up Betty's imploring cry. "Just think what it means for her!"

"Ooo, yes, queek, queek!" And Naomer, taking consent for granted, went dashing away to wriggle into coat and hat.

"Queek!" she was shrilling back to the others, as she simply hurled herself downstairs.

"Well?" Polly questioned the Head Girl eagerly.

"Is it all right? Are we allowed?"

"Yes, go on!"

And in half a minute they were gone!

In the Hour of Triumph.

A STREET door went slam! and then the lamplit High Street rang with the steps of girls who were simply streaking along the pavement.

"Come on!" Polly needlessly urged the others. "Fancy being able to tell Miss Redgrave—to-night!"

"Simply gwand!"

Paula, for once, was actually keeping up with her chums. She was in their midst when they turned out of High Street and went prancing up a side road; she was jostling between a couple of the others as they all ran the length of one bye-road after another. A policeman on his round stood spellbound as the excited schoolgirls went tearing past him at one corner.

Ah, but what joy it was to them! Miss Redgrave, in her darkest hour—saved! And saved by them, her own devoted girls!

"Here's the road!" jerked out Polly, a minute later. It's one of the villas on this side—number eighteen."

"Number twelve—fourteen—"

"Yes, wather! Hoo-way, geals!"

"Sixteen! Here we are—eighteen!"

And Polly dashed at the knocker.

Rat-tat! Rat-a-tat-tat! Rat-tat—TAT!

It was the landlady who opened the door. So excited were the girls, they simply asked in a chorus, "Miss Redgrave?" and then swept in past the good woman, to go rushing upstairs.

"Miss Redgrave!" some of them called out breathlessly, and suddenly a door on the first landing opened, revealing the ex-mistress, with lamplight behind her.

She spoke in amazement:

"Why, Betty—Polly! And you others!"

"Yes, wather!"

"Ooo, yes; queek—queek!" was Naomer's own pet cry of joyful excitement, as she rushed in upon Ruth Redgrave and hugged her. "I kees you—queek!"

"But—"

"You're saved—SAVED!" Polly fairly yelled. "You'll be asked to return to Morcove in the morning!"

And they told her the glorious news.

It was but a few minutes ago that they had been fetching a deathly pallor to Mabel Cunliffe's face by what was being said. Now there was just as great a pallor in Ruth Redgrave's countenance, but she had gone as white in the face as this only from shock.



TROUBLE IN STORE! "My goodness!" gasped Tess at the window. "Miss Cunliffe is just coming in!" "What!" "Howwows, gals!" The others gasped in dismay. "Miss Cunliffe had returned and the four girls who had gone to search for her were still out. What were they to do!"

With Betty & Co. mobbing around her, beside themselves with joy, she suddenly became infected with their laughter, and then as suddenly she burst into tears.

"Ah, but it is too wonderful!" was her emotional exclamation. "The way you thought it all out, the way you have borne with that girl, all for my sake! The way you have acted to-night—"

"Well, it was our only chance, and we took it!" laughed Polly.

"It was risking your own futures for the sake of mine! If you had failed, if you had never been able to prove what you suspected, Morcove School would have finished with you, it is certain, as it finished with me the other day! And, instead—"

Once again Miss Redgrave's voice became strangled with sobs. She could not continue, and it was Polly who resumed blithely:

"Instead, we did succeed!"

"Yes, wather!"

"We have Ethel Courtway to bear witness where the missing pump was found," joined in Betty elatedly. "We have Mr. White to bear witness that the pump was lost on the very night when all the trouble occurred. Miss Cunliffe has given herself away, too, by going out this evening to hunt for the pump. If that doesn't convince Miss Somerfield—"

"But it will—oh, it will!" sang out Polly. "And Miss Cunliffe knows it! I wouldn't mind saying that she is getting packed up now, to get away before she can be—sacked!"

They saw Miss Redgrave become greatly alarmed, after looking so overwhelmed with relief and joy.

"If that is what you think, girls, then I— Yes, I must go round to Mabel Cunliffe at once!" she exclaimed tensely. "If she has any idea of going away to-night, I must see her first. I want to tell her that, for her mother's sake. I will do my best to—to get everything overlooked."

"What!" gasped Betty & Co.

But Ruth Redgrave would not remain a moment longer in talk. In a flash she was dressed for out-of-doors, and was hurrying from the house, causing the astounded girls to troop after her. It was not until they had covered half the distance to Modena that she murmured shakily:

"You may have wondered why I gave her the chance to continue for a single week at Morcove School, when I knew the enmity she bore me. You may wonder still more how I can feel like trying to get her proved guilty overlooked. It is all for the same reason!

"Ever since we were at school together she has been a grief to her widowed mother. The girl so disgraced the family name that her mother even reverted to the name she bore before marriage. That is why Mabel Denver, as she was in the old days, is Mabel Cunliffe to-day. I hoped, for the mother's sake, that under that name Mabel was wanting to make good. Morcove was a splendid chance for her—"

"And she has thrown that chance away," exclaimed Madge Minden sadly. "simply for the sake of her old dislike of you!"

The talk lapsed, for Miss Redgrave was in great haste to reach the boarding-house. They ran the rest of the way, and even so they were only just in time to see the street door open, letting out Mabel Cunliffe, with some luggage in either hand.

It was another dramatic moment that the girls would never forget. They saw Ruth Redgrave, with the generosity of her noble nature, put herself close to the one who had been her cruel enemy.

"Mabel, don't go like this!" the chums heard their own beloved mistress entreat earnestly. "Wait until the morning, and I will plead with Miss Somerfield! Once before, you left a school in deep disgrace. I will tell her what it will mean for you if—"

"It may mean what it likes, I don't care!" was Mabel Cunliffe's rash cry. "Stand aside, and let's hope we never meet again!"

And those words were the last that Betty & Co. ever heard the cruel lips utter.

Another moment saw Mabel Cunliffe going upon her own wild way, to pass out of their lives for evermore.

The chums, it is to be feared, kept up the rejoicings up to a late hour that night at Modena. But they were astir early enough next morning, to go off in the school 'bus with—Miss Redgrave!

Miss Redgrave, after having seen her faithful scholars safely indoors, had returned to her humble lodgings, with the promise to join them at Modena early next morning.

Long before it was time for the 'bus to start, Betty & Co. were anxiously pacing the floor of the sitting-room, while the others gathered round the windows watching for the arrival of Miss Redgrave.

"What if she doesn't come, after all, but decides to go straight on to Morcove to see Miss Somerfield?" suggested Madge Minden. "Won't it be—"

"Howwows!" exclaimed Paula. "I hope she won't do that."

"No, of course, she won't," said Betty a trifle

impatiently it seemed. "She said she'd come here, and come here she will, you see if she doesn't."

"Hurrah! Right you are, Betty. Here she comes!" almost shouted Polly Linton.

And a crowd of excited Fourth-Formers all gathered round the windows, waving their arms frantically as their beloved mistress drew nearer.

A few minutes later, amid much excitement, the girls from Modena crowded into the 'bus along with Miss Redgrave, and were soon within sight of Morcove's big iron gates.

And so, after all, the fine old school welcomed back the one who had grown so used to living for its welfare. The Fourth Form was given a whole day's holiday to celebrate the happy event. There never had been a jollier day for Betty & Co. in particular—except for one uncomfortable ten minutes.

That was when, in Big Hall, Miss Somerfield made quite a speech about it all, giving all the girls to understand in emphatic terms what she and they owed to a certain batch of juniors over **THE RIGHTING OF MISS REDGRAVE!**

THE END.

Next week's fine Morcove story begins a splendid new series. It is "The Girl Who Forsook the Farm." Don't miss reading it!

This Week's Birthday Gifts List!

CLAIM NOW IF YOU WERE BORN ON
ANY OF THE DATES GIVEN BELOW!

Readers who were registered in the SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN Birthday Gifts Club before Saturday, October 15th, 1927, may now claim for their birthday gifts if the date of their birth coincides with the list given here. An entirely different list will be published next week and during subsequent weeks.

If you were born on any of the following dates:

January 15th, 1909,
February 25th, 1911,
March 7th, 1913,
April 22nd, 1912,
May 10th, 1914,
June 15th, 1910,
July 9th, 1917,
August 22nd, 1915,
September 5th, 1914,
October 30th, 1916,
November 8th, 1913,
December 2nd, 1914,

fill in the coupon provided here, and send it to:

The Editor,
"Schoolgirls' Own" Birthday Gifts Club,
Gough House,
Gough Square,

London, E.C.4,
so as to reach this address not later than Thursday, October 27th. Please write the word "CLAIM" in the top left-hand corner of your envelope.

Birthday Gifts.

Claim Coupon.

Name

Address

I declare myself to have been registered in your Birthday Gifts Club prior to Saturday, October 15th, and as the date given here (*here*

state date) is the day on which I was born, I wish to claim a (*state name of Annual you would like*)

..... in accordance with the rules of the club.
SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN. October 22nd, 1927.