

FOUR SPLENDID ANNUALS NOW ON SALE!
(See page 323)

The **SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN** 2^d

GENERAL ORDER
Seashore is out of bounds to
whole school until further
notice
PUNISHMENTS
Betty Barton and "Linton"
for misdemeanors
Gated until
further notice



THE FORM CAPTAIN TO BLAME!

An arresting incident from this
week's EXTRA LONG, COMPLETE,
Morecove School story within!

A Stirring Tale Featuring the Chums of Morcove School, ENTIRELY COMPLETE in this Issue.

Saved by Schoolgirls!



Tea For Four!

"A NOTHER cake, Betty?"
"No," thanks,

Jack!"

"Polly?"

"Finished?"

"That's too bad," laughed Jack Linton, brother of madcap Polly Linton, of Morcove School. "Because Dave and I haven't!"

And he forked a cream-bun on to his own plate.

There were only four of them seated at that table in the tea-room of the popular Barncombe Creamery, but a very jolly quartet they made.

Betty Barton, captain of the Fourth Form at Morcove, had run into town this Wednesday afternoon, accompanied only by Polly. That was a rare enough circumstance, but there were no unpleasant reasons to account for it. The chums of Study 12 were going as strong as ever!

Still more unusual had it been for Betty and Polly to come upon Jack and his great chum and study-mate at Grangemoor School—quiet Dave Lawder. First the two girls had met Dave, gazing into a bookseller's window. They had

Through thick and thin, Betty Barton, captain of the Fourth Form, and her chum, Polly Linton, have always stood together. And when it came to the question whether Polly's brother and his chum should suffer unjustly, or Betty and Polly take the blame—the two chums were still of one mind!

come across Jack, coming out of the Central post-office, all the jollier for having just cashed a pound postal-order.

So Polly's brother was not hard-up to-day, anyhow, assuming that sundry loans from Dave could stand over until the end of term.

"Cups?" inquired

Betty, who had charge of the teapot.

"Just a little, please," said Dave. "This place is quiet this afternoon, isn't it?"

"You help to make it quiet!" retorted Polly. "He's wishing he had bought that book, Betty, so that he could have read it over tea!"

But this was only in fun. There was no fellow freer from rudeness than dark, thoughtful Dave. He now accepted Polly's chaff with such sober delight at his being worth her teasing, she felt the old encouragement to continue.

"Sometimes I wonder what it would have been like to have had Dave for a brother instead of Jack!"

"Do you ever wonder," spoke Jack, "what it would have been like for Dave to have you for a sister? Nunno, things are

BY
MARJORIE STANTON

best as they are, Polly-wop. Far better that you should have a brother like me—standing no nonsense, firm! I say, it's a pity not to clear this dish of pastries!"

"Naomer should be here," commented Betty, in allusion to that dusky, ever-hungry imp who was Morcov's royal scholar. "She'll go off the deep and when she hears that you boys have taken us out to such a nice tea!"

"Accidents will happen," Jack pretended to deplore the meeting. "I said to Dave, when we were starting away from Grangemoor, whatever we do, don't let's run into Polly and the rest! Didn't I, Dave?"

"And Dave said," chimed in Polly demurely, "personally, there was nothing he would like better than to meet me and Betty. Didn't you, Dave? Such a welcome change after the boredom of life with other fellows—especially Jack!"

"Wait a bit," said Jack, drinking the last of his tea. "I shall have something to say in a moment. A really nasty one. For it's obvious, Polly, you are too uppish to-day. You need one of my best verbal chastisements. Pardon!"

"What do we do when we go from here?" Polly blandly inquired. "So long as we are back by five, Betty and I will be all right."

"Let me think," pleaded Jack solemnly. "You do talk so much, Polly-wop."

"I won't be called that name!"

"I find it conveniently brief," said her brother. "I mean to say, one can't always come out with Polly-wolly-doodle-all-the-day! What, wouldst assail thy brother?"

"I would," declared Polly, brandishing a spoon. "Be serious, Jack; behave in a teashop! What time is your train back?"

"Five-four; or was it four-five, Dave?"

"Five-four."

"That's what I say," scowled Jack; "we are here until five o'clock, and only the shops to look at in their off-season deadness. Life, Davey boy, is full of mistakes. And have you, my children, ever considered how one mistake leads on to another? Alas! One comes into Barncombe, intending a jolly halfer. Mistake! One only meets one's sister—a sheer calamity, when one has just received a supplementary grant from the gov'nor. One has tea; one has too many pastries; result, no prep, this evening."

He helped himself to a particularly intriguing little pastry, as a round-off to the meal.

"Yes, boys and girls, happiness is all in the anticipation. As Cicero has it—"

"Oh, hurry up with that cake, and let's be off!" Polly witheringly interrupted. "Betty, we'll leave our bikes to be called for another day; go back along the shore—"

"The sea—the sea!" cried Jack lyrically. "Dave, my boy, we will away to the seashore for a sniff of the briny."

"You had better come with us," the madcap advised, with great condescension. "You poor boys at Grangemoor so seldom see the sea; that's where Morcov scores over you—see?"

"See what it is to have a sister, Dave!" said Jack, with a grin.

On their way out, it was Dave who stopped at the chocolate counter, purchasing two large boxes of the "best mixed."

"This is for you, Betty and Polly," he remarked rather shyly, passing one of the pound boxes to Betty. "And perhaps you'd like to take the other to Naomer?"

"Extravagant boy!" Polly admonished him on the pavement. "You would have done much

better to buy that book you hankered after, Dave!"

But Dave dissented with that serious smile of his which always made his dark, clever face so very attractive. Almost he was like a brother to each girl; he, an orphan-lad with not a relation in all the world—only a lawyer-guardian.

What with Dave being Jack Linton's best chum at school, and his having spent so many vacations with Jack and Polly and the rest of the Morcov chums, there had been much to put the lad on this firm footing with the girls.

It was an October afternoon, and the weather had been wild and wet for several days on end. At Morcov, the games field was in a sodden state, and outdoor conditions were no better at Grangemoor. The stoppage of play accounted, in part, for the presence of these four in Barncombe this afternoon. And now, as they sauntered off together, a good deal blown about by the high wind, they met a few other schoolgirls cycling in from Morcov.

There were friendly remarks in passing, but there was no stopping for talk. Now that Betty and Polly had made up their minds to "hike" back to Morcov along the shore, they were all for pushing along sturdily.

A few minutes, and the town was left behind, and by a rough road the four made brisk going, in spite of the wind's buffetings. Time after time, two Morcov hats were dipped to screen their wearers' faces from some really sharp blast.

This road to the shore was over high ground and very exposed to any wind raging in from the wide Atlantic.

"Burr! Poof!" panted the madcap presently. "There will be a heavy sea on that's certain!"

"Should be a fine sight," said Dave. "I suppose you girls hear the gales in the night at Morcov?"

"Enough to fetch the place down!" was Betty's answer.

"How will the tide be?" Jack suddenly wondered.

"Oh, falling—should be," said his sister confidently. "Otherwise it wouldn't be safe for us to try to go all the way along the shore."

Jack, of course, had been thinking of this when he voiced the question. He and Dave knew the coast very well, although their own school was several miles inland—different from Morcov, standing high on a headland fronting the Atlantic.

A zigzag path—one of several along this rugged stretch of coast—led down to the beach. Before descending, Betty and Polly and the two lads stood staggering in the wind on the cliff-top, admiring the wide, foam-lined sea, dark under a cloudy sky.

One behind another, down they went, taking the big rock steps in the zigzag carefully, whilst the blast from the sea thudded and whined in their ears. Long before they were at the bottom of the path their faces were salted with spray. Their feet clashed upon the shingle at last, and it was joy to the youngsters to have the giant waves bursting in so close, making one continuous roar.

"This is how I like the sea to be!" Betty shouted above the boom and crash of waves. "What would any seaside holiday be without a day like this?"

"But is the tide falling?" asked Dave, pausing to watch the inrush of yeasty surf and then the backward surging.

"Must be," insisted both girls. "It was high tide yesterday about an hour before this. So it must be going back now."

"Although it's still high enough!" added Betty, with a laugh. "Never mind; we'll manage!"

And off they set, keeping close in under the cliffs as floundering steps took them along the weed-strewn beach.

"You boys won't have time to come with us all the way," called out Polly, after their first ten minutes' thorough enjoyment of the ramble.

"We'll leave you where that other zigzag goes up the cliff, at Cliff Edge bungalow," sang back Jack.

"Right-ho!"

A spent wave went back with a harsh roar; another wave toppled over—boom!—and came in under a sweeping flood up the shingly bank—almost to their feet!

"Ha, ha, ha! It's grand!" exclaimed Polly. "How I wish the others were with us!"

"Jolly," agreed her brother. "We didn't do so badly, after all, by meeting you girls—did we, Dave?"

"Come on!" cried Polly, who would let no one else lead. "It is such fun!"

A Wild Day at Morcove!

FOR a couple of miles the quartet scrambled their way along the storm-swept seashore, never with any risk to themselves, yet enjoying many a thrill.

There were shoulders of rock to be rounded, where the tumbling breakers seemed to be roaring the challenge: "If you dare!" But always the jovial party got round without mishap, although there were mock screams from Betty and Polly, and chuckles from the boys, when some extra big wave would cast sheets of spray at them.

So at last they neared the spot where good-byes were to be said. They had one more rocky corner to negotiate, with the tide very close to the foot of the cliff just there, and then they would be in a little bay.

Suddenly Polly turned round to address Jack and Dave with a certain seriousness.

"Remember when you were staying at Cliff Edge, Dave, to convalesce after your illness, and Jack used to come over from Grangemoor to see you?"

Dave only gave his reflective nod; but Jack burst out:

"What a time that was, eh, girls? That was when Prefect Rennard at Grangemoor was giving me such a rotten time."

"But he was bowled out in the end." Betty laughed. "You don't have any trouble with him now?"

"It rangles, you bet," responded Jack lightly. "and we have to mind our step—especially at present. Dave and I have had the luck to be booked for the Inter-School Athletics, coming off in a fortnight's time at Plymouth. Rennard would like to see our names taken off the list, but he can't just manage it."

"Even though they have made him a pre. again." Dave at last offered a contribution to the talk. "Mistake, I think. But Grangemoor doesn't know the fellow as Jack and I do."

"That's where it is at school!" nodded Betty. "We have one or two like that at Morcove."

"I know you have," said Dave, thinking of Cora Grandways and Hetty Curzon.

"So you two boys will help to represent your school at Plymouth!" cried Polly. "We have heard all about it—so much talk in the local papers. Biggest event of the year?"

"So far as schools like ours are concerned," nodded Jack. "Yes, it will be a jolly big affair, and a ripping treat for those who have the luck to go. They've booked diggings for the various teams in some of the best hotels. All expenses paid! Sight-seeing between the acts, so to speak; motor-trips, back to late dinners—"

"I don't want to hear!" Polly pouted. But at heart she was feeling very proud that Jack and



Strong hands grabbed both girls as they were floating over the shingle, caught by the receding wave. Lucky it was for Betty Barton and Polly Linton that Jack Linton and his chum were there!

Dave had won their way, by sheer merit, into the Grangemoor team.

"And I suppose," she said, "you fellows will come home with all the silver shields, and medals, and things!"

"We hope to bag a few," grinned Dave. "Have a jolly good try, anyhow."

"And Rennard doesn't like the idea of you two boys being in it?" called Betty over her shoulder, lightly.

"It's in his eyes every time we meet him," chuckled Jack. "Isn't it, Dave?"

"It surely is," that lad answered tersely. "But about this corner we've got to round—tide's a bit close up?"

"It is!" agreed Polly. "Whoosh, that was a whopper!"—as a huge wave thundered to the shingle within a few yards of the base of the bluff. "I say, just look!"

It made them pause—to see what a swirl of foamy water covered the shingle, almost reaching the wall of rock.

"This always is a nasty corner," sang out Betty, above the noise of the tide. "This is where you can get caught, unless you're careful. But it's going down right enough."

"Better if it had gone down a bit more," was Dave's murmured opinion.

"Oh, windy!" Polly derided him. "Shall Nanny take his hand then? Come, Davey boy, give Nanny your hand and she'll see you round!"

"Dave, I wouldn't stand it!" Jack said ferociously. "Such cheek—from a girl!"

"He wouldn't, from any girl!" said Polly, chuckled Betty. "Well—here goes!"

Another great wave had just receded, so it seemed a good moment. Betty and Polly had the boys shouting that they should go in front; but Morcove only answered Grangemoor with a light laugh.

Joining hands, the two girls made a dash for it, giving shrieks of mock dismay as they realised that another monster breaker was towering along the shore, its green crest breaking down into white foam.

That wave thundered to the shingle. "Come on!" yelled Polly. "Ha, ha, ha! Oh, loo-ock out, Betty—"

"Wow!"

"Gracious!" gasped the madcap. The burst wave had swished up the shingly slope, reaching the very base of the cliff. Betty and Polly felt the cold sea swirling about their ankles; then it was up to their knees. They staggered, although clutching at each other, so violent was the swirl. Then some of the water slapped hard against the cliff and went up in a fountain of spray.

"Betty—oh!"

"Polly—keep still!" But that was beyond Polly's doing now. Almost swept off her feet by the rush of water, she had lost her balance when all that spray came sheeting down heavily, blinding both girls for the moment, and leaving them in water-weighted clothes.

Then Betty, making a grab for floundering Polly in sudden real alarm, fell over as well. The water was growling back, with a strong tow in it. In all their seashore activities, never before had these two girls been so tricked by the waves—so taken by surprise.

They were floating out over the shingle, with another wave making ready to crash down upon them.

Then strong hands grabbed both girls and drew them back to safety, but not at once clear of the water.

Jack had seized Betty: Dave had hold of Polly. "Well, I'm dashed!" shouted Jack. "Cosh, now you girls have got—really wet!"

"Oh!" Polly spluttered salt water out of her mouth. "Oh, my goodness—oh! That's done it! Dave—"

"I've got you, Polly."

And no other wave did worse than circle round the ankles of the four of them.

Jack and Dave helped the girls round the jutting cliff-base, and there in the sandy bay they stood still to recover breath and get over the scare. For a scare it had, been!

"Something to do with the spring-tides," Dave

remarked tersely. "They sort of change their minds about going out, and stay in. Pity; now you're soaked!"

"What about you two boys!" cried the girls. "We're all right—soon be home and changed." "Salt water hurts nobody," laughed Jack. "Only ruins one's togs. I say! You can't keep on along the shore. Look at the waves at the other end of the bay—right up to the rocks. You'll have to go up the zigzag with us—"

"Oh, bother!" grimaced Polly. "That means dragging home along the main road—in this drenched state. Every girl we meet will be laughing at us!"

Betty was pondering. "Can't we— Yes, we can!" she decided joyfully. "Oh, hooray, don't forget the cave just here—the one that has been turned into a boat-house, belonging to the bungalow. We can go in there, perhaps, and—"

"Gee! That's the idea!" broke in Jack. "No one will ever object, even if it's known that we used the cave. Anyhow, let's get a move on; you girls mustn't stand about in wet things."

As it turned out, the gates to the private cavern were merely fastened with an odd length of stout rope. Jack soon had the knots untied, and then Betty and Polly darted in, the two lads following promptly.

"Any Port in a Storm!"

AFTER the hurly-burly of wind and waves on that rough shore, it seemed to be an oppressive, uncanny silence that prevailed in the cavern. Apart from that silence and the gloom, however, the place was not at all cheerless.

Various tenants of the furnished bungalow on the cliff-top had used the cavern down here much as holiday-makers use a beach bathing-hut. The drawn-up boat by no means monopolised space. Behind it, room had been found for a table, several stools, and a locker or two.

"When my guardian rented the bungalow, he bought a stove for making tea down here," Dave remarked. "Wonder if it's still here? If so, we might light it."

"And then the girls can dry off!" rejoined Jack, more or less seriously. "Better than scuttling home to school, looking half-drowned!"

"Here we are!" Dave had thrown back the lid of a locker and was already lugging out a spirit-stove.

"And here's enough spirit," he added, fetching out an old bottle that was labelled, "Methylated spirit."

"You boys must be the ones to stay and dry yourselves," declared Betty. "You have a train journey—"

"We have that five-four to catch, and that's a fact," said Jack. "And I suppose we ought to be getting back to Barncombe now? As for the wet—pooh!"

"We shan't hurt," agreed Dave, whilst he primed the picnic-stove.

A pause ensued. Polly and Betty met each other's eyes and suddenly burst out laughing.

"We are in a state, and no mistake!" "Gee, I say!" Jack shouted, as he made a joyful discovery in another locker. "Coffee! And a tin of milk!"

"Kettle where I found the stove," Dave remarked, making ready to light up. "Everything's been left, it seems. Now, you girls you must get yourselves a good hot drink, and that'll be as good as a change into dry things."

"What, another tea!" chuckled Polly.

"No, a coffee this time—and free," said Jack, excitedly rummaging out enamelled cups and saucers. "Just our luck, Dave, that we shan't be able to stay for a free issue. We must get away."

"What a shame!" murmured Betty.

Yet her wrist-watch told her that the two lads really must get back at once. To miss the five-four would mean trouble with their Housemaster. They were in water-logged boots, sopping socks, and their trousers were wet up to the knees. But brisk walking, followed by discreet wringings-out in the privacy of a railway carriage, would do wonders!

"Cheers!" said Jack, as his chum got a good flame going. "Well, girls, make yourselves at home! And don't forget to clear up afterwards! I'm sorry it's happened, but this is what comes of a chap meeting his sister, I tell you! 'Bye, Betty—"

"You're off? Good-bye then, Jack," smiled Betty, looking quite gay in spite of her bedraggled state. "And you, Dave. Thanks awfully for all this! Polly and I are going to manage beautifully!"

"How do you feel?" Dave asked the pair of them, anxiously.

"Small, that's how I feel!" owned Polly. "Oh, and Paula Creel and the others have escaped it all! Think of us to-morrow tucked up in the san., wid shockin' coads in the head!"

Jack gave his sister an affectionate, if teasing, pull at her side hair.

"No swinging the lead over this, Polly! You'll go into school in the morning, as per usual! 'By-ee, and don't ever ask me to come out with you again!"

From the mouth of the cavern the two girls watched Jack and Dave take plunging strides over the shingle to the foot of the zig-zag. Both boys turned to wave a last cheery farewell, and the girls, in spite of their discomfited state, waved back gaily.

Then Betty and Polly ran back into the gloomy cavern to where Dave had lit the spirit stove. He had put the kettle on to boil, after half-filling it from a fresh-water spring that trickled from a fissure in the rocky walls of the cave. The flame of the stove burned very steadily in that sheltered place, and already the kettle was starting to sing.

"They are sports," exclaimed Betty.

"What a scream, Betty!" chuckled Polly. "I feel wet through, but it isn't the first time, and we know very well we shan't take any harm."

"Get a good rub down and a change into dry things as soon as we get indoors," said Betty. "We'll just wait to have a gulp or two of hot coffee, as the boys advised it, then be off."

Polly nodded her light-hearted agreement. There being only a minute or so to wait for the water to boil, it was obviously the sensible thing to do. Then a brisk run for the school would do the rest to warding off any chill.

The kettle suddenly puffed merrily at the spout, and promptly the girls brewed their coffee, drinking it unstrained. It may not have been the best cup of coffee they ever sipped, but it was hot, and no mistake! At every sip, Polly gave a grimace.

In the meantime they did their best to wring sea-water out of their clothes, and altogether they felt more comfortable when at last they hurried away.



"Cheers, girls!" called Jack and Dave as they left the cave. "Hurry up and get dry!" Polly and Betty waved gaily in spite of their bedraggled state.

They had extinguished the stove and left everything as it had been found, tying the gates on leaving. It still looked as if to go along the shore to Morcove meant the chance of being splashed again by the waves, and so the girls made a scrambling rush up the same zigzag by which Jack and Dave had returned to the cliff-top a few minutes previously.

At the summit the girls emerged upon smooth grass, with two paths—one leading away to the road, the other going to Cliff Edge bungalow. Without a pause for breath, Betty and Polly made for the road, galloping along with the wind behind them now.

"Talk about being warmed up!" panted Polly. "Phew!"

"Yes, I feel a bit different now," laughed back Betty. "I wonder if we'll get indoors without any fuss being— Hallo!" she changed to a startled murmur, having sent a side glance to the bungalow. Are there people in it, Polly?"

"Thought it was up to let!"

"So it was—so it is, for the board's still there," added Betty. "Yet I thought I caught sight of someone walking about just then."

"No fires going," remarked Polly. "Someone come to see over the place, perhaps?"

Nothing more was said. The two girls were in too great hurry to do the mile run to the school.

A few minutes later the Study 12 pair were at Morcove School. On their way to the porch they saw how desolate were the sodden playing-elds. Inclement weather had induced the girls to continue the enjoyment of "comfy" studies after tea.

Not only did they enter the great schoolhouse unnoticed; they even got upstairs and did everything necessary to atone for the misadventure, and no one any the wiser!

Such an escape from all fuss naturally caused the pair of them to be all the merrier in their looks as they finally repaired to Study 12. The Fourth Form captain and her madcap chum strolled down the long corridor, feeling very fine after the change into dry things, whilst they knew that everything that had got wet was set to dry.

In Study 12 they found Naomer Nakara and the beloved duffer, Paula Creel, chatting away together—or, rather, Naomer was doing all the chattering, whilst Paula, extremely languid and comfortable in the best arm-chair, was a patient listener.

"You are not working!" Polly instantly censured these two.

"No, bekas—"
"No excuse!" cried the madcap, with mock ferocity. "Disgraceful! Betty and I can't go out for a single hour without—"

"Single hour!" shrilled Naomer. "I like zat, bekas, what ze diggings, you have been out since I don't know when! And look at ze time now!"

"Wheah have you been, you geals?"

"Oh, we happened to meet Jack and Dave," threw out Polly, with provoking carelessness, "and they took us to tea at the Creamery."

Up rose Naomer. "There now! And, of course, it was a gorjus spread?"

"We had a nice tea, yes."

"Very nice," agreed Betty.

"Just bekas I was not with you!" shrilled the dusky one. "Eet not fair! All I have had is tea with Paula, and zere was nothing for tea—nothing! Only some almond cake, and a teeny bit of Swiss-roll! What else did you do?"

Betty and Polly met each other's eyes then. An inclination to burst out laughing excited the suspicion of Naomer.

"What else did you do? You say, queek!"

"If you must know," grinned Betty, "we came back along the shore as far as Cliff Edge, and got soaked!"

"Bai Jove! Howwows!" gasped Paula, who could never bear a spot of wet. "Soaked?"

"To the skin, yes!" rippled Polly.

"And serve you jolly well right," glared Naomer, "for going without us!"

But Paula was not so heartless,

"I trust you are none the worse, geals, for your experience?"

"Oh, no!" shrugged Polly. "We had some hot coffee—"

"What!" yelled Naomer.

"In the boat-cave under Cliff Edge; there was a stove, and a kettle, and—"

"I am deegusted!" announced the Imp. "You do nuzzing but come in for treats all ze time! Big teas at the Creamery—and I suppose you had cream-buns?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Well, I don't want to hear any more," said



"Girls, girls, come and look!" called Tess Tre-lawney excitedly. In a moment the chums realised—

Naomer. "I shall settle down to prep. Paula, get ze move on and come and help me do my prep. Bekas I am deegusted with Betty and Polly, yes! Eet not surprise me anything that Polly does; but I thought better of ze captain!"

"Why, what has Betty been doing now?" inquired Helen Craig, coming in with Pam Willoughby at this moment. "Anything very serious?"

"Most sewious, bai Jove! Geals, Betty and Polly have been getting drenched to the skin!"

"What!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

In the end, a graphic account of the afternoon's adventure had to be given, most hilariously, to a packed-out study. Madge Minden and Tess Trelawney were there; so were Elsie Ashby and Pat Lawrence.

"Tess and I were down at the seashore this afternoon," Madge remarked presently. "Tess wanted to sketch the rough sea, but she nearly got blown away, and so did I."

"Dreadful weather!" lamented Paula, with a shuddering glance towards the gale-buffed window. "I shall be glad when it's over."

"Blow itself out in the night," was Tess

them. Apparently Prefect Rennard still has a bit of a down on—

"Girls come and look!"

It was an interrupting cry from Tess at the window. She had spoken so excitedly, every chum of hers in the study took part in a rush to the window, thinking of the gale-ridden sea and of ships in peril. It was a very dangerous coast.

"Where, Tess—where, what?" the girls were all asking anxiously, when suddenly their own eyes gave them the answer.

A most extraordinary, puzzling sight it was.

The darkening sea was empty, but a lot of smoke was in the air in the region of Cliff Edge.

As all the girls instantly realised, the wind-scattered smoke was not coming from the bungalow — and that was a relief, for the place would have had to be on fire to cause such a thick pall.

Nor was it a bonfire, otherwise Tess, in the first instance, would never have spoken in such alarm.

In a moment other girls held the same belief which had seized Tess. The smoke was being blown up from the seashore by the violent wind, to come billowing over the cliff-top in great clouds.

"Ship ashore down there, and on fire?" hazarded one of them.

"Can't be!" cried Polly. "It's only a little while since Betty and I were down there at that very spot, and there was no sign of anything then!"

"It's coming from the shore just under Cliff Edge, right enough," murmured Madge. "It might be the boat-cave."

Betty and Polly made a startled turn to each other.

The cave!

How Did It Happen?

"BUT surely," exclaimed Helen Craig, "there can't be a fire in the cave?"

"We lit a stove—a spirit-stove," Betty said, after a heavy pause, during which the others' eyes had fallen upon her and Polly. "But we put it out before we left!"

"Everything was left quite all right," Polly



—what had happened. The contents of the cave where Betty and Polly had taken shelter were on fire!

Trelawney's confident forecast, as she moved to the window to take a last look-out before darkness covered the stormy world.

The light was waning even now, and blinds would soon have to be drawn and lights switched on in all the studies. Tess took a stand at the window and dropped out of all the chatter.

"I wonder how Jack and Dave have got on?" chuckled Polly, at last. "They must be just getting indoors at Grangemoor now. Hope they have our luck—no fuss!"

Betty nodded a little seriously.

"A pity if that prefect chap dropped on them; he might seize the chance to make trouble for

declared emphatically. "Yet it does look as if the fire must be down there—in the cave!"

Again they all looked across the twilight stretch of land to where the smoke was still blowing up from the shore, and blowing wildly along the cliff-top.

It did not diminish, and as they watched, the girls felt more concerned than ever.

Suddenly they heard surprised murmurs from schoolmates who, in other studies, had had their attention attracted to the smoke. In a few moments the whole schoolhouse became full of commotion.

Betty and her chums first went out into the corridor, there to find other girls speculating as to the meaning of the smoke, then they fell in with some who were going downstairs to make inquiries.

Miss Everard, the Form-mistress, had come away from her room, a prey to the general alarm.

"Miss Somerfield will be sending to find out what it means, girls."

Even as this was said they heard the headmistress voicing a request to that effect.

"Let one of the gardeners go across, please, to find out the meaning of that smoke. I don't like the look of it. If it is a fire in the boat-cave, perhaps I ought to telephone into Barncombe, although I don't see how anything can be done."

"Anyhow, girls," came Miss Everard's calming remark, a few moments later, "there is nothing you can do. Time for prep., isn't it?"

The hint had to be taken, and there was a return to the studies. For a little while longer scholars watched from various windows; then it became too dark. They saw no glow of light in the falling night, and so the comforting belief was formed that, whatever blaze there might have been, it had spent itself by now.

Study 12 drew down its blind, and books were spread by all four tenants of that popular rendezvous. They were alone together now—just the four rightful occupants of the study, with a good hour's evening work in front of them.

Like Paula and Naomer, Betty and Polly dipped their pens and began upon prep., but they were uneasy. Some of their chums had been chaffing them about having caused the fire by a bit of carelessness.

That, of course, was all nonsense! But it might not be so easy to escape the blame for what must have been a blaze-up causing serious loss.

"Have you the dictionary, Polly dear? I just want to refer to—"

"Oh, take the dic!" And it was pushed across with more force than politeness.

Naomer chuckled. "Don't spik to Polly, Naomer; she has got ze wind-up! Well, serve her right—you too, Betty! Bekas—"

"Hark! Now, who's this?" wondered Betty, feeling sure that someone running down the passage was going to turn in at this door.

Next second that door flew open, revealing Morcove's only day-girl, Dolly Delane. She was in outdoor things, and very breathless and dishevelled.

"Why, Dolly—"

"What ze diggings! Bekas—"

"I had to come!" puffed Dolly, heeling the door shut behind her. "I've run all the way to tell you. The boat-cave belonging to Cliff Edge—burnt out! Such a fire; but it's all over now!"

She flopped down into the nearest chair, stared at by the four. Her glowing face was wet with rain, and her hat dripped.

"I went across with dad as soon as we saw the smoke coming up over the cliff," she panted on. "Down there on the shore we couldn't get near the cave. It was a furnace."

"Good gwacious!"

"Yes, bekas—"

"Sh'rrp!" Polly silenced the dusky one. "Well, Dolly—go on!"

"The mystery is how it started! Dad says that somebody must have becu into the cave—"

"Polly and I went into the cave, may as well be said at once, Dolly," interjected Betty, "this afternoon."

"Oh!" said Dolly. "Oh!"

"But we never caused the fire—we did not!" cried Polly strenuously. "Is it likely?"

"Zey only lit a stove to make coffee and have another feed, and—"

"Sh'rrp!" stamped Polly. "You had better be careful, Naomer!"

"You had better be careful yourself, next time you light stoves in caves and—"

Naomer got no further. She would have been taken by the ear and led to the door, only Dolly now jumped up to be off again.

"Miss Everard wants to see me about it all," she explained breathlessly. "She let me run up here first. Of course, girls, I shan't say anything about—about you."

"Oh, you needn't mind what you say," Betty said calmly. "It'll have to come out now, of course."

"And so you will be expelled!" Naomer teased the involved couple. "And serve you right! Bekas, eef you had stayed at home at school, instead of going out to tea with Jack and Dave, and having gorjus spreads without me—"

"Outside!"

And out went the imp—shot into the passage upon the heels of the departing Dolly, who careered away, laughing.

Paula retired from her seat at table to the best arm-chair.

"Work, geals, is impossible at pwsent—"

"Why?" glared Polly. "You are not in for a rowing, anyhow!"

"Twue," sighed Paula. "But—er—wrealising that this means an awkward pwedicament for you and Betty—"

"Oh, any excuse!" Polly exploded. At sight of Naomer peeping back into the study, she brandished an ebony ruler.

"You dare to come in, Naomer!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Betty.

But Naomer made her peace at last with Polly, who, of course, had been mostly in fun, and thereafter Study 12 was as it should be.

Evening lessons were knocked off, harmony prevailed, and it was not until close upon call-over that there occurred a jarring note. Cora Grandways putting her head round the edge of the door to say, with malicious delight:

"Betty and Polly—to go to the headmistress at once!"

Which School to Blame ?

WHAT did this mean? That Cora Grandways took it to mean trouble for the Form-captain and the mad-cap was obvious enough. Cora, inveterate enemy of Study 12, had that wide grin which was always hers when hoping to see the chums involved in a row.

"At once, you two!" repeated Cora.

"Oh, all right!"

"My word, and I wouldn't be in your shoes!"

"Well, you are not being asked to wear them," Polly retorted, going out with the captain.

Hoydenish Cora whistled her way round a corner to her own study, whilst Betty and Polly walked up the corridor. This summons from the headmistress—ominous! Something to do with the fire, for a certainty!

"Oh, well!" smiled Betty. "We have only to tell the truth!"

So little did she anticipate—and Polly was the same—the complications that had arisen in the course of the evening. Both girls presented themselves to Miss Somerfield, in that lady's private room, calmly prepared to give exact account of their doings at the cave, and as calmly expectant of being acquitted of all blame. But Miss Somerfield made a beginning that upset all calculations.

"I have been rung up by the headmaster of Grangemoor School, girls—about that fire at the cave!"

And then, before Betty and Polly had got their breath back:

"It appears that Jack Linton and Dave Lawder caused the fire—as you girls are aware?"

For a moment they remained—staggered. It had never entered their heads that Jack and Dave could be involved in the matter. Yet Miss Somerfield's first words had been to that effect.

"What have you to say, girls?" pressed on the headmistress, with a sternness seldom displayed. "Betty? Polly? You are not, surely, going to try to keep anything back?"

"No—oh, no," Betty said, a trifle lamely. "We expected to have to tell you, Miss Somerfield. We didn't report when we got in, shortly after tea-time, about getting so wet from the sea."

Miss Somerfield's brows went up.

"You got wet! That's the first I've heard about that! My information is that Jack and Dave were seen coming away from the cave shortly before the fire started. They were seen to come up from the shore by the zigzag path at Cliff Edge, apparently after you two had left."

Betty and Polly turned to each other once again in round-eyed amazement. Miss Somerfield, it was evident, had acquired misleading evidence—but how?

"Isn't it so, girls?"

"Er—" stammered Polly; and then Betty said: "Er—er—"

"Well, what? No evasions, please! You, Betty, will tell me exactly what you both did this afternoon."

"We went into Barncombe, Polly and I, and met Polly's brother with Dave Lawder. They gave us an early tea at the Creamery."

Miss Somerfield's nod, whilst implying impatience to hear the more vital part of the narrative, also implied full approval of that little tea-party at the Creamery.

"Then Polly and I thought we would come back along the shore to enjoy the rough sea," Betty continued steadily. "The boys had nothing to do until their train went, about five o'clock, so they said they would come part of the way with us. Well! The tide was tricky, and, although we never ran any risks, Polly and I got fairly swamped by one big wave—near the cave. So the boys advised us to—"

"You see, Miss Somerfield," Polly felt obliged to strike in, "Dave Lawder's guardian rented the bungalow and the cave at one time, and so it—it seemed all right to go into the cave and—and light the spirit-stove—to save ourselves from catching a chill, and all that!"

"Then that is how the fire occurred!" was Miss

Somerfield's horrified comment. "A spirit-stove! Who lit it? Did you or the boys?"

"Dave lit it," answered Betty. "But that had nothing to do with the fire—"

"Couldn't have done!" chimed in Polly forcibly. "They left before us! We put the stove out, and cleared up, when they had been gone—quite a little while!"

The headmistress, reluctant to doubt her girls, was left with a puzzled frown.

"What you say, Polly, does not tally with what the headmaster of Grangemoor has been informed, namely, that the boys left after you! Now, be very careful what you say. For it looks to me as if either Grangemoor or Morcove is going to be held accountable for that very serious fire. The spirit-stove did it—must have done!"

"No, Miss Somerfield, please—"

"Even if I could accept that denial—as I am sure I want to do—others will not," stated Miss Somerfield gravely. "Of course it was the stove! That is what everybody will say. And those of you who were the last to leave the cave must be held to blame! If you, as you say, were the last to leave, then—then Jack and Dave stand absolved. But their headmaster has it that they were seen to come away after you!"

"Wrong," said Polly. "And I'd like to know who it is—"

"So would I!" broke from Betty tensely. "The boys were not to blame! If it must have been the stove—well then, we're to blame, aren't we, Polly?"

Eagerly that girl nodded.

"If it was the stove," echoed Miss Somerfield. "And I say that it must have been. A spirit-stove? The very thing to cause a fire! Now then, are you still going to assert positively that you, and not the boys, must have been to blame?"

"Yes, we must have been!" answered both girls as with one voice.

"Then how about those boys being the last to leave the cavern?"

"That's not true, Miss Somerfield! We have said so from the first," Betty insisted. "We were the last to leave. We did the clearing-up, put out the stove—"

"Or thought you had put it out, and somehow it must have been still burning—alight inside when you put it out, perhaps," Miss Somerfield reasoned. "Well, since you are so positive, I must let Grangemoor know—"

"Yes, do, please!" cried Polly agitatedly. "Oh, please ring up the Head and say, Jack and Dave mustn't be blamed—they mustn't be!"

"Wait, both of you!"

And with that command Miss Somerfield turned to her telephone on the desk. She put through the call for Grangemoor School; then, whilst waiting for an answer, with the receiver in her hand, she spoke across to the two girls solemnly:

"You fully realise? If those boys are to be absolved, it can only be on the understanding that you accept the blame for what happened! Before I speak with Grangemoor, you really wish me to say that you consider yourselves to blame?"

"If the stove caused the fire, then we caused it," said Betty.

At this instant Miss Somerfield knew that she was through on the wire. Making a slight turn towards the instrument as she began conversation, she unwittingly set her back to the girls, and then they exchanged eloquent smiles and nods.

"Is that you, Doctor?" Miss Somerfield questioned; now that she had been put through to the headmaster of the boys' school. "About that fire

at the cave, Doctor; I have Jack Linton's sister with me now, and her friend, Betty Barton. Can you hear me? I am given to understand by the two girls that Jack Linton and Dave Lawder could not have been responsible for the fire!"

The Study 12 couple smiled tensely.

"Yes, Doctor, it really does amount to that; you must absolve your two boys! My two girls are most emphatic! You see, they insist that they were the last to leave the cave, and that your informant must have been mistaken. By the way, who was your informant, may I ask? A prefect? Oh, Prefect Rennard!"

Betty and Polly heard that name with violent starts. Gerald Rennard, the informer! The very prefect who had anything but friendly feelings for Jack and Dave!

Only too well the girls knew what a grudge Rennard had against Jack and Dave.

Miss Somerfield was listening to much that the headmaster was saying at the other end of the line. At last:

"I see!" she responded gravely. "Then I am very glad, for their sakes and the credit of the school, that you can acquit them. I should have been very, very sorry if it had meant that for them! I know both boys quite well, and have always found them most reliable; but even as an accident the thing is too serious to be overlooked."

Again she listened. A few moments later Miss Somerfield rang off, and then, sternly, her talk with the girls resumed.

"So the disgrace must fall upon Morcove, not Grangemoor! You heard me say I am glad that the two boys have escaped the punishment intended, since you have established their innocence. The headmaster was going to gate them for a month and debar them from all part in some inter-school athletics which are taking place in a fortnight's time. Jack and Dave will form part of that team after all; they would not have done so had they not been cleared. Their headmaster was most angry—and so ought I to be, now that you stand before me as the self-confessed culprits. For it amounts to that!"

Not nice for Betty and Polly to hear such condemning words coming from a headmistress with whom they usually stood so well!

"The more I consider," continued Miss Somerfield, "the more convinced I am. It was the spirit-stove that caused the fire, and those who had the last use of the stove and were the last to leave the cave are the ones to blame. A nice thing—and one of you a Form captain!"

Betty did not flinch. There she stood, her calm looks never faltering; and it was a moment for Polly to stand just a little closer to this chum of hers.

"I cannot overlook the matter," stated Miss Somerfield sadly. "It would be deemed favouritism. And, the captain being involved, it is upon the captain my severest censure must fall. Polly, you may go now, and your punishment will be made known to you. Wait here, Betty!"

So saying, Miss Somerfield turned to her desk and sat down, taking pen and paper. Mute and still stood Betty, like a soldier at attention; and Polly strode to the door. Miss Somerfield was writing on, and perhaps she did not observe the sympathetic glance which Polly gave Betty over one shoulder on the way out.

The door closed and there was silence—a complete stillness in that great room until the headmistress rose to hand the Form captain a slip of paper.

"Take that to your Form's notice-board, Betty, and put it up. I am sorry, but I can deal no differently with you. Some will think the punishment all too light. But if you are the girl I take you to be, it is punishment enough!"

Pale now, Betty went out of the room, head bowed as she received the half-sheet of paper.

And then, outside the sanctum, she gave her eyes to what was to go upon the notice-board,

GENERAL ORDER.

The seashore is out of bounds to the whole school until further notice.

PUNISHMENTS.

Betty Barton and Polly Linton, for misdemeanours affecting the good name of the School—

Gated until further notice.

"Laugh at Them!"

BETTY! Let me see——

"Sh!"

Polly had come back with a quick and silent step to where Betty was standing in a dimly lit passage, staring at the half-sheet of paper.

"You—you don't want to see it, Polly——"

"I do—I must! A notice, is it?" whispered the captain's best chum, almost snatching at the paper. And then, as she scanned the few lines of writing:

"Oh, Betty!"

"Don't look like that, Polly. Here I must go along and stick it up," said Betty, taking back the slip. "And I really don't care, Polly, so long as——"

"Ah, I know—I know you won't let yourself care, Betty! But it's rotten——"

"What about yourself?"

"I'm different—entirely. I'm not the cap. And besides, Jack's my brother."

"Yes, well, you're my chum—and so is he, I should hope, and Dave! And you saw how it was, Polly; unless we as good as took the blame, they would have been blamed. Nothing less than that——"

"I know!" Polly sighed again, heavily. "Oh, dash!" she exploded. "Oh, hang and dash that Rennard chap! It's all through him, Betty! He's a dangerous fellow——"

"Out to smash Jack and Dave together, if he can," nodded Betty. "And we can guess why."

They drifted on towards the hall where Morcove had his various green-baize notice-boards.

"Just fancy," muttered Betty, "if Jack and Dave had been deprived of their place in that team for the inter-school athletics!"

Polly nodded, looking as if she had to swallow a lump in her throat.

"It would just about have broken their hearts. The boys were talking about those inter-schools this afternoon, weren't they? And Jack's last letter to me was full of it. Oh, Betty, but it was good of you to be so ready to do what you did to save them!"

"They would have done it for us, Polly."

There was no time for more. The bell clanged, ringing Morcove's scholars down to prayers. Brisking up her step, Betty went straight to the Fourth Form notice-board to affix the slip of paper. Polly was still with her. Drawing-pins had to be extracted from the green-baize before they could be used to affix the notice, and Betty was still engaged upon the humiliating task when other girls came swarming down from the studies.

"Hallo," was the interested cry from many, "what's on now, then?"

Across to the board they surged, their looks showing that only a pleasant surprise was expected.

"Then—groans!
"What! Seashore out of bounds—to the whole school!"

"Oh! Ugh!"
"Here, girls, come and look at this! Whole school—not to go down to the beach!"

It was with a kind of aggrieved howl that more girls came swarming up.

"Why—why? Oh, how beastly!"
"Sickening! Pooh!"
"Hallo, and see whom we have to blame for it, too!" rang out the voice of Cora Grandways, now that she had pushed close to the board. "Betty Barton and Polly Linton—gated!

"Misdemeanours"—oh, my, Study 12 in disgrace, just fancy!"

Neither Betty nor Polly had turned away to get clear of the excited throng.

"Do read, girls!" grinned Cora, a finger directing special attention to the lower half of the notice. "Ha, ha, ha! The captain, too! Well, I am surprised!"

But there were plenty of girls who could see nothing in it to laugh about. They switched angry eyes from the notice to confer furious looks upon Betty and Polly.

"It's your fault, is it, that the whole school has to suffer like this!" cried one.

"Of course it's their fault!" exclaimed another disgustedly. "This comes of their setting fire to the cave!"

"What! Was it their fault? Oh!"

"It was a spirit-stove," asserted Hetty Curzon silkily. "We heard how they had been using one in the cave."

"Shame, anyhow! Fancy letting the whole school in for—"

"Girls, girls, silence there! Less disorder!"

That was Miss Massingham, suddenly stalking into the midst of the seething mob that it had become, to give dispelling gestures. "Fall in, this instant!"

Then, as the crowd broke up, some of the disgruntled scholars encountered Miss Everard. She was totally different from the Fifth Form-mistress, and could be asked about the out-of-bounds order. Several of her own juniors clamoured to be told how long it was likely to be in force.

"I cannot say, girls," was the gentle answer.

"Probably the headmistress is only thinking of the attraction that the burnt-out cave will be during the next few days. Go to your places, there's good girls."

"What the headmistress is thinking," scowled Cora, "is that it's a nice disgrace for Morcove—and so it is!"

But it was nothing to Betty and Polly that a girl like Cora Grandways now enjoyed such a glorious chance to sneer. The annoyance and anger of Form-mates who usually held Study 12 in great esteem—that was the bitter pill that needed such swallowing!

On the way up to the dormitories that night Betty managed to take Polly aside for a minute to impart a very serious warning.

"Polly," whispered the captain, "there is just one thing more we have got to be agreed about. There's not to be a word to our chums that we have really taken the blame for the sake of saving Jack and Dave. It would never do."

"I'm afraid it would n't," gloomed Polly. "I had thought of that, Betty. They might go and give the whole show away—for our sakes!"

"Just so! All right then, that's agreed, so let's go on up to the dormi. You are not—sorry, Polly!"

"Are you?" was the retort. "When it comes so much harder upon you, Betty!"

Before the captain could let a calm smile give the taken-for-granted answer, Polly exploded again.

"Ugh!" she stamped. "What I'd like to do, Betty, would be to prove that we had no more to do with the fire than did Jack and Dave! But how on earth can we do that

now? If only we could, Betty!"

"We may in the end, Polly; you never know!"

"Meantime, we've just got to stick it?"

"Well, and isn't it worth it?"

It was against Betty, as captain, that the whole dormitory seemed to be demonstrating. Some girls were only booing for fun; but Cora had managed to stir up really bad feeling amongst others. The moment Betty entered with Polly there were sarcastic cries, ironical cheers, and many facetious remarks.

"Brought your spirit-stove to bed with you, Betty? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Boo! Who set fire to the cave to get warm again after getting soaked by the sea?"

"The-captain did! Ha, ha, ha!"



"My two girls insist that they were the last to leave the cave!" Miss Somerfield was saying over the telephone to the headmaster of Grangemoor School. This would mean punishment for them, Betty and Polly felt sure.

"Bravo, the captain! I'd be ashamed, Betty!" "She doesn't care!" This was Cora, at the top of her voice. "See how she laughs! What do either of them care, even if they have got the seashore put out of bounds to the whole school? Boo!"

Betty made answer for the first time. "It isn't our fault that the seashore has been put out of bounds—"

"It is—it is!" "It isn't!" Betty insisted calmly. "That's only because Miss Somerfield doesn't want crowds of girls going to look at the cave after the fire."

"And who caused the fire—didn't you and Polly?" the retort was flashed by several disgruntled girls.

"Oh, but it was a pure accident; don't be hard on them!" laughed Cora tartly. "Shame, to call it a 'misdemeanour'! Just as if our captain could do wrong!"

At last Miss Everard appeared to quell the disturbance, and she was not quite so good-humoured to-night; a bit bleak towards the captain in particular.

"You must keep better order than this, Betty! Don't let me hear another sound! Good-night, girls!"

"Yes, Betty, why don't you keep order?" jeered Cora softly, the moment Miss Everard was gone from the dormitory. "Where's your spirit?"

"She put it all in the stove!" said Betty.

"Ha, ha, ha! D'you hear that, girls?" bleated Cora. "What a scream it is! But I oughtn't to laugh. They'll both be down with chills in the morning—even though they did set fire to the cave to get dry again! And then what will the Form do without its wonderful captain?"

"Rennard the Fox!"

IN class the following afternoon Polly Linton got a sudden shock.

Her mind, straying from the immediate lesson, caused her glance to stray out of one of the big windows. She noticed someone cycling up the main drive of the school—and then her heart leapt.

For the cyclist was a Grangemoor boy. In a flash Polly had recognised the cap and scarf that were so familiar to her, worn as they were by her own brother. And this was Jack himself, was it?

No, not Jack, but—Gerald Rennard! That odious prefect, the informer against Jack and Dave, yesterday.

"Go on with your work, Polly!" Polly brought her straying gaze back to the books in front of her, repressing a sigh. No use resenting Miss Everard's admonition. It had not been unkindly voiced. But, oh, what a thing it was to have to work as usual in times like this! There was Betty, working away just as if yesterday had never happened, and as if the Form in general had not been resentful ever since! Marvellous girl, Betty.

"About yesterday, for a cert.," thought Polly, dipping her pen to resume writing. "Well, if he has anything to say to me!"

Soon after this a parlourmaid came very quietly into the hushed class-room to convey some message to the Form-mistress.

Polly saw Miss Everard note the time by the school-room clock. It was twenty-past three, and the dismissal would come at half-past.

"Presently, tell him, Ellen. The girls will be out in ten minutes."

"Very good, miss."

Hearing this, Polly knew that Gerald Rennard, wanting to see her, had got to wait. Just as well! Do him good!

At last school ended for the day, and Miss Everard beckoned both Polly and Betty during the march-out.

"You two girls—you will find a prefect from Grangemoor School waiting about out of doors," said the Form-mistress gravely. "It appears that he has come over, with the Head's approval, to see you both in regard to yesterday's affair at the cave. Just see what he wants."

Betty was no more surprised than was Polly, for the latter had managed to whisper her chum that "Rennard the Fox" had turned up. That, incidentally, was what Polly had dubbed the Grangemoor prefect during her brother's trouble with him early in the year.

Making their way through an outer hall that was thronged with other girls just let out of class, the Study 12 pair reached the open air. Rennard was close at hand, striding up and down the gravel with a self-important air. He came towards the two girls, who were feeling sufficiently irritated without any need for his overbearing greeting. The exasperating thing to Betty and Polly was that Form-mates of theirs were within earshot, having hurried out to games.

"Hallo, kids!" smirked Gerald Rennard. "I thought I would come along to have a word with you, being over this way again to see about the bungalow. I was there yesterday, you know!"

"We have since guessed, anyhow," Betty said frigidly, "that it was you hanging about the bungalow when we passed."

"Oh, did you see me?" he laughed. "I saw you—coming away from the path up from the shore."

"After my brother and Dave had come away," said Polly curtly.

"No, before, I think!" dissented Rennard, with his suave smile.

"You're wrong—and you know you're wrong!" flared out Polly. "Betty and I were the last to leave the cave! Our word is as good as yours; it has been accepted, anyhow, and so that's an end to your trying to get Jack and Dave blamed! It hasn't come off this time!"

"Cheeky as ever," he said thickly, after blenching a little. "I am not forgetting you two girls gave me your cheek a term or two ago."

"Then perhaps you remember," Betty retorted, "that you got the worst of it that time?"

"We'll talk about yesterday, if you don't mind! I was called to the Head, late last evening, to say that my information must have been incorrect. You two kids had as good as owned up to causing the fire. Anyhow, you had declared that you were the last to leave the cave, and that you saw to the putting out of the stove."

"So we were the last to leave—"

"Sure?" he asked, gleaming his eyes upon both girls. "Because I'm not, and I told the Head so. I stand by what I said. There it was; I happened to be over at Cliff Edge bungalow, because the relation who pays for my schooling rather fancies the idea of renting a seaside place for the winter. From what I saw—"

"Oh, what you saw!" Polly burst out scornfully. "Isn't it more a case of what you have made up? It isn't true, so that's an end of it!"

"Not necessarily," dissented Rennard. "And those chaps are not out of the wood yet, let me tell you! The matter doesn't stop where it is. It may suit you girls to go to any length to shield

Jack and Dave. Very noble of you, and all that, I'm sure! But—"

"Look here!" panted Betty, anger taking her a step closer to Gerald Rennard. "You had better go away. It does not need any nasty remarks from you to make us understand how wild you are at Jack and Dave escaping the blame. We girls know all about that, and so you can go!"

"I'm going," he nodded, "to send in my name to your headmistress, and have a word with her."

"Much good that will do you!" flashed Polly. "You don't suppose she wanted to believe that we were to blame for the fire if the stove caused it? Yet she had to—"

There Polly broke off, making a half-turn to glare at Cora Grandways.

For the second time in the last minute or so Cora was sauntering by—obviously for the purpose of overhearing the heated talk.

"What do you want?" bridled Polly.

"I want to go down to the seashore," retorted Cora tartly. "Only it's out-of-bounds to the whole school—thanks to you and Betty!"

The same impulse seized Betty and Polly. They would stand no more of Gerald Rennard; nor would they allow Cora Grandways to hang about them like this!

So next instant they were walking away together. They heard Rennard's voice after they had turned their backs upon him, and they guessed that he had fallen into talk with Cora. But he could not have had much to say to that girl, for when the Study 12 pair glanced back at the schoolhouse porch, Rennard was even then coming on alone towards it.

"Means to see Miss Somerfield, does he?" muttered Polly.

"Well, let him!"

"I really don't see that he can undo any good we have done Jack and Dave," pondered Betty. "Oh, it's all right, Polly; don't worry."

"I don't worry! I only long to find out who or what did cause the fire! But that," sighed Polly, "I suppose, will never be known now."

On a side table in the entrance-hall a newspaper was lying. Noticing it, and recognising it as a local one, Polly turned aside to pick it up. She wanted to see if it had any account of the fire; but it had gone to press before any report of that fateful affair had reached the editor in Barncombe, yesterday being the publishing day.

After a hasty glancing through the pages, Polly would have tossed the paper down, but suddenly a small paragraph caught her eye.

It was headed: "Grangemoor School," and was only one of those "coming events" paragraphs with which the local paper was full. Yet it meant a thrill for Polly—a thrill of pride as she saw her brother's name, and Dave's, in the team-list for the inter-school athletics about which all the best boys'

schools in the West of England were so excited.

"Look, Betty!"

Then the captain took the paper and read the paragraph pointed out to her. She smiled, laying down the paper.

"Fine," was her comment. "Won't Jack and Dave just about enjoy it, too—going to Plymouth for that big event! Do hope Grangemoor does well."

They went up, encountering not a few girls who gave them the go-by very pointedly. The Form could not bring itself yet to forgive the captain and her chum.

Then, in Study 12, they found the atmosphere so different from the usual vivacity and playfulness. The chums were as united as ever; but any trouble affecting the captain and the madcap was bound to react upon the others. Paula looked most mournful. Naomer, for once, was laying tea without any real heart for the job! Madge and one or two more had looked in, and were sitting about more or less glumly.

All talk had lapsed when Betty and Polly entered, and so those two inferred that they themselves had been under discussion.

"Hallo, Polly dear, you're looking wather depressed!"

"Who's depressed?" retorted Polly.

"Zen, if you are not, you ought to be!" Naomer began a serious lecture. "Bekas, you see how it has upset ze whole apple-cart, and all bekas you didn't have me with you yesterday. Catch me



"You're wrong—and you know you're wrong!" Polly flared at the Grangemoor prefect. "You can't get Jack and Dave blamed! Betty and I were the last to leave the cave!"

setting a cave on fire! I am not careless, like some of you."

At this point, Naomer tipped lump-sugar out of a paper-bag into the milk-jug, in mistake for the sugar-bowl.

"Oh, you're a marvel, you are!" said Polly, getting up to take note of this bit of absent-mindedness. "Now look what you've done!"

"Eet all your fault! Bekas, I am all mixed-up to-day. I tell you, zis disgrace you are in—it has taken away my appertite!"

Polly took leave to doubt that tragic assertion; and, indeed, Naomer, when they all sat down to tea, was quite able to do justice to the good things displayed.

Under the effect of cream-buns and Swiss-roll, she adopted a less censorious attitude towards Betty and Polly. She was sorry for them now, and they must make a good tea—"bekas, eet no good starving, even if ze whole school is deegustered with you!"

Suddenly the subdued gathering came in for a sensation. Quiet talk stopped abruptly; teacups were hastily set down; wondering looks were directed towards the door, beyond which a puzzling commotion had arisen.

It sounded as if many girls were careering this way down the corridor, in great excitement. There was a jabber of talk, with no angry note in it.

This absence of anything suggesting indignation caused Betty and Polly to think that the disturbance could have nothing to do with them. Indignation was all they could expect, at present! Yet the study-door flew open, to let that small mob of girls give ringing cheers for yesterday's "culprits"!

"Hooray, the cap! Good old Betty! Polly, too—hurrah!"

That pair stood up, agape at such a totally unexpected demonstration.

"Now, what—" began Polly.

"It's all right for both of you!" they were informed deafeningly. "Miss Somerfield wants to see you, Betty—and you, Polly! We know very well you never caused that fire in the cave—and so does the headmistress now!"

Betty and Polly felt their heads spinning. They exchanged round-eyed looks, then stared again at all the girls in the doorway.

"You've been cleared!" they chorused.

"Cleared? Cleared? How?"

"A prefect from Grangemoor," said Etta Hargrove; "he has made it all clear—that you really didn't cause the fire after all; that you couldn't have been the ones to cause it!"

"But—" gasped Betty and Polly.

"The cap, for ever! Study 12 for ever!" Etta incited the others to cry aloud. "Now that we know—cheers, girls! Cheers for Betty and Polly!"

"Hurrah! Hooray!"

"Yes, wather! Gweat wejoicings; gweat—Owp!"

"Bekas—gorjus! Hip, pip—hooray!"

As many as could were pressing into the study, wanting to overwhelm the captain and the madcap with congratulations.

"Shame that you felt you had got to take the blame," Ella's voice rose above the hubbub. "Never mind; it's all right now—"

"Yes, Betty; yes, Polly! You're cleared! And the Form knows—"

"And only Cora Grandways is sick about it," laughed Pat Lawrence. "Cora would have liked the Form to go on feeling aggrieved; but it has stopped her tongue for a bit."

"Good job, bekas—"

"Sh'rrp!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No, bekas," insisted Naomer, "I owe you both ze apology! Betty, plis let me agolopise—I mean, apojjilise!" And the dusky one hugged the captain. "Polly, queek, a jolly good hug for you as well! Bekas, eet was a mistake for me to be deegustered, yes! You are innocent!"

But Betty and Polly, in the midst of all this commotion, although it meant restored goodwill and hearty congratulations, could only feel dismayed.

It had flashed upon both girls—since they were absolved, what about Jack and Dave?

Were those two lads, themselves guiltless, to come in for the blame after all—and that heart-breaking punishment?

And such thoughts were so alarming, suddenly both girls broke clear of the throng and ran out of Study 12.

They felt they must rush away to find Miss Somerfield and so find out the worst!

Can Nothing be Done?

"YES, come in, you two! I am wanting you!" The change in Miss Somerfield's attitude towards Betty and Polly now! Yet neither girl could feel the least joy in knowing themselves to be restored in the eyes of the headmistress. The one thought was beating in the mind of each: What about Jack and Dave?

"Of course, Betty and Polly, you know that Prefect Rennard has been to see me? It is a relief to me to be able to square your evidence with his; to know that no one has acted discreditably! Oh, and I have lost no time," Miss Somerfield smiled on. "I have telephoned to the headmaster of Grangemoor, telling him the latest."

"What is the latest, please?" Betty asked breathlessly. "For Polly and I can't make out—"

"No!" struck in Polly, with energy. "Anything Prefect Rennard has said, if it puts the blame on Jack and Dave after all, is still wrong!"

"You mustn't say that, Polly—"

"Miss Somerfield, I do say it! I—"

"Listen, and you will soon feel that you owe Gerald Rennard an apology. He tells me that he has felt very upset at his evidence not being in accord with yours. He now sees, however, how it came about, and so do I. A most simple thing. After you had left the cave, having seen Jack and Dave off a few minutes previously—the two boys came back!"

"No—"

"Polly, now, please! That is the perfectly simple explanation, bearing out Gerald Rennard's first information, without upsetting yours and Betty's. You two girls were right in thinking that you were the last to leave the cave. You were not to know—but Gerald Rennard has suddenly realised—Jack and Dave returned to the cave just after you had left it!"

"Why should Rennard suddenly realise that they did that?" Betty asked tensely.

"Rennard says that he now remembers glimpsing two figures starting to descend the zigzag after he had seen you come away. Later he saw both boys quite plainly, come up the zigzag—that is to say, after he had seen you go by."

"He didn't say that last evening!" cried Polly.

"No, well, it needed the difference between Rennard's evidence and yours to set him wondering—"

"Now he'll get Jack and Dave blamed after all!"

"Polly—"

"It's all very well, Miss Somerfield, but my brother and Dave Lawder are going to suffer—"

"I cannot help that, Polly, although I am very sorry, of course, that two such lads should have let themselves in for this. Just the same as I was sorry that two such girls as you appeared to be the culprits; but now I know better!"

It still meant nothing to Betty and Polly that their headmistress held them entirely absolved. There they stood, with frowns that no pleasant looks of hers could dispel.

"Where is Rennard now, please?" asked Betty.

"Oh, he has gone—although I fancy he has returned to the bungalow to see about one or two things. He fancies his rich relation will be taking it for the winter. But never mind about that now. Betty, wait whilst I write out another slip for the notice-board! Polly—you may go. Believe me, I would rather it had been any other two boys at Grangemoor than your brother and Dave Lawder."

"It was not their doing!" Polly insisted huskily; and then she heeled round and walked out.

Shakily her hand drew the door shut behind her. Her mind was chaotic.

Jack and Dave landed with the blame after all! That Rennard—the victor, as he had made up his mind to be, by fair means or foul!

She drifted on a few steps; then stopped to wait for Betty.

Like one half-stunned by bad news, Polly stood about in that side passage.

The telephone had rung a few moments since, without Polly's noticing it. But now she gave a violent start as she heard Ellen, the parlourmaid, at the instrument, saying:

"Hold the line, please! I will see if I can find Miss Linton."

Out into the hall rushed Polly.

"Here I am, Ellen! For me—is it?"

"Oh! Yes, miss—how fortunate! I was just going up to—"

"Thanks, Ellen!" And Polly, receiver in hand, spoke tremulously:

"There? Polly Linton speaking! Oh, is that you, Jack?"

"That's me, Polly," his low voice quavered through on the wire. "I say, Polly, what's this about you and Betty having been blamed, up to a few minutes ago, for that fire at the cave?"

"Oh, well—er—"

"Dave and I have only just been told by our Head. All we know, until just now, was that we were acquitted. We were told yesterday evening evidence had come to light, clearing us, so we let it go at that. We never dreamed, Polly—"

"Just as well, Jack. Betty and I didn't want you to know and be worried. But now," Polly said lumpily, "you—you yourselves are both—"

"Yes. And it's all that Rennard's doing, Polly. I say, why I 'phoned up. Dave and I no more caused the fire than did you and Betty."

"Of course you didn't! I've been trying to convince Miss Somerfield! But Rennard now says—"

"He can't tell the truth, that chap! Wait till I get hold of him! But, although I am going to wipe the floor with him, Polly, 'course that won't—"

"And nothing you can do ever will, Jack."

"Fraid not, old girl. No. Dave and I—won't go to Plymouth now. Still, don't you—Hallo, I must ring off, Polly," her brother whispered at his end of the line. "I am not supposed

to be using the 'phone. Good bye, Polly! 'Bye, sis!"

"Good-bye, Jack—"

And she was crying. Polly was, as she hung up the receiver. Only too well she knew the bitter, the cruel disappointment in those words: "We won't go to Plymouth now." And then that last wistful word: "Bye, sis."

"Polly?"

"Nothing," said the madcap, and she smiled through her tears now that Betty was with her again. "Only—that was Jack ringing up just then."

"He and Dave—they are up against it now?"

"Oh, yes. It's all up with them."

"It's a shame! See what Miss Somerfield has written this time, Polly, for me to put up on the notice-board, yet I can't feel pleased."

Polly took the half-sheet of paper, dully scanned it, then handed it back.

"I must be a wretch, Betty, to be putting Jack before you even—"

"Rubbish! You would be some sister, not to do that!"

They moved across to the notice-board, and Betty tore down the former notice and affixed the new one in its place—all without the least delight. Then she turned to Polly.

"Oh, dash that Rennard!" burst out fiery Polly. "Can't we do something, even now? We must—we must! It is joy to that wretch that Jack and Dave are not to be in the inter-schools. It's the revenge he has been longing for! Look here—he's at the bungalow?"

"So we were told—"

"Then let's go across, Betty! We'll do that, anyhow; tell him what we think of him, and—"

"And whilst we are over there, Polly—I say!" came the captain's excited whisper. "Let's go on down to the cave, shall we? The seashore is no longer out-of-bounds. Nobody may be there. We'll take a look round, and we may—there is just a chance—we may do some good yet!"

"Come on then!"

And in a few moments they were off.

Schoolgirls on the Trail!

NO sooner had Betty and Polly started their impulsive rush from the schoolhouse than they wished they had their clumps with them.

The dusk closed in early at this late season of the year, and there had been not a moment to spare for a run upstairs to the studies.

Dark clouds hung over land and sea, but there was not the violent wind of yesterday to oppose the girls as they sped along. The gloomy light tended to make them feel that they had less time than was really the case. Hardly a word did they exchange, but saved their breath for the sake of speed, and so, in a very few minutes, they were going along the gravel path which led to the bungalow's porch.

It was Polly who stabbed a finger at the bell-press. Such a ring she gave, too! Then the pair of them peered through the glass of the door impatiently.

"Not here!" muttered Polly fiercely. "We're too late; he's gone."

"Seems like it. Oh, well—"

"But I did want to go for him!" raged Polly. "Oh, it would have done me good to tell him to his face! He's gone, though, back to Grangemoor—which means he's gone back to gloat over Jack and Dave!"

"We'll go down to the cave, Polly—"

"Rather! Come on!"

That Polly's disappointment rankled at their having missed the prefect was evident enough as she and Betty now hurried away to take the zigzag path down to the shore. Again and again Polly glanced back at the bungalow, as if she still hoped to see Rennard, and each time she sighed hard.

Down the craggy path they hastened, and the everlasting boom of breakers smote their hearing once more.

Suddenly, however, Polly checked sharply when in advance of her chum at the foot of the cliff-path. And now the noise of the waves could not prevent Betty from hearing the other's voice, for the whispur was dropped right in her ear:

"Careful, Betty! He's got someone with him!"

"What? Who?"

"Rennard!" whispered Polly in tremendous excitement. "I take it that he's in the cave, whilst another fellow is keeping watch outside!"

"Yes! He hasn't seen us. He wasn't keeping a good look-out. Half a sec.!"

So Betty kept still, whilst her chum—better placed for doing so—warily peeped round a great crag.

For a full minute Polly must have watched before she drew back and reported:

"I know the fellow. It's the one they call Ginger Heldway. He's got red hair."

"And he's no great friend of Jack and Dave!" grimaced Betty.

"Not he, or he wouldn't be with Rennard! But Heldway has gone into the cave now. I think he has gone to tell Rennard they ought to be going. He's been looking at his watch."

Betty rubbed finger-tips across a puzzled forehead.

"What does it mean, Polly—if Rennard had to post another fellow at the mouth of the cave?"

"We're going to see," declared the impetuous one. "In my opinion, this has something to do with the fire. Coming?"

"Yes, go on!"

With extreme caution they emerged upon the shingle, treading it lightly as they went towards the dark mouth of the boat-cave.

If possible, they meant to try a bit of detective work.

Along the rugged shore the waves tumbled into foam, but the girls, whilst they crept towards the cave, were finding their ears getting accustomed to the brawling noise of the sea.

Finally, quite close to the cave's gloomy entrance, they had a large block of rock to shelter them. To their joy, this mass of fallen cliff cut off a good deal of the sound of the tide; but it was to do more than that for them!

Pausing there, they listened hard.

"Well, come on out of this, Rennard," a boyish voice boomed faintly from the cave. "We must catch the six o'clock, anyhow!"

"Just a bit. The blessed thing must be here—lying about for someone to find," came a kind of groaning complaint from the prefect. "You might have searched whilst I was over there at the school, Heldway! You know what it means, if ever—"

"I did search!"

"You weren't searching when I got back just now! I tell you straight, I know I dropped that lighter of mine yesterday, when the fire started—"

"Well, it was lost in the fire, that's all. You're too windy, Rennard!"

"How could a silver lighter be destroyed? The fire was nothing like as bad as that! And it's got my initials—oh, dash!" the listening girls heard Prefect Rennard raging. "Come on, Heldway; help me to—"

"Rennard, you must chuck it in now, I tell you! We'll come again, that's all. You've got that excuse—about your rich relation thinking of taking the bungalow."

"He's decided not to take it—"

"Never mind; the school isn't to know that! Come away now. I shall go, anyhow."

"Heldway—wait!"

"Can't!"

"Oh, all right. But you're a fine pal! You had your share of the fun yesterday—"

"Fun! It wasn't much fun in the end, Rennard."

They were coming out now. Behind that giant



"Careful, Betty!" whispered Polly. "Prefect Rennard's in the cave—and he's searching for something!"

boulder nipped Betty and Polly, so as not to be seen. Never in their young lives had they felt more excited.

Crouching close together behind the rock, they heard but did not see both schoolboys emerge from the cave.

The pair had stopped talking, and what with this lapse into sullen silence, and the bad-tempered clash of their feet in the shingle as the couple made for the zigzag, their mood could be easily imagined.

Less than a minute later they were gone, making the toilsome climb with haste; and then Betty and Polly darted into the cave.

It still reeked of fire, and in the gloom the girls saw only the charred remains of all that had been stored there—the boat, the lockers and contents, the spare oars, sails, and other fittings.

"Burnt out," Betty commented. "It must have been a blaze. There were tins of paint, of course."

"And those two fellows were themselves the

cause of the fire!" Polly said furiously. "You heard? You put two and two together?"

"Yes, Polly."

"They were at the bungalow yesterday—came down here after we had left! Larking about," Polly carried on the chain of reasoning, "with the stove! They lit it. Rennard used a silver lighter—and lost it!"

"If only we could find it, Polly!"

"We're going to find it! Oh, we must, if we stay all night," Polly cried out in her frantic state. "Find that lighter, with his initials on it, and we save Jack and Dave after all!"

Betty crept to the mouth of the cave, to make sure the coast was clear. From there she made a sign that all was well, but Polly did not heed it. Already she was searching with desperate haste, muttering about the bad light and the confusion.

"That Rennard has been turning everything upside down," she raged. "He and his pal have both searched everywhere! Never mind; we are going to have better luck than they had! Oh, we must find it, Betty!"

"If not this time—"

"Don't talk of having to come some other time!" Polly implored, whilst they both hunted



about, turning over charred relics with hands already blackened. "It's now or never. You don't know what may happen to prevent our coming again. Bad storms; something on at the school—"

"I say, Polly!"

"Well?"

"Sandy floor to this cave," Betty remarked. "And supposing you dropped something like a silver lighter—wouldn't you be likely to tread it into the sand?"

Polly brought her hands together with a great clap.

"But, of course! It's just what Rennard would do in the excitement of the fire—when he and Heldway found they couldn't put out the blaze!"

"And perhaps they didn't think to rake through the sand when searching!"

Polly went upon her knees and began spading and raking at the damp sand then and there. Betty, instantly, was doing the same.

No treasure-seekers ever worked with greater haste or in greater excitement. Eagerness kept them searching on in silence. The cavern grew dimmer still, so that at last both girls could hardly see, but they would not give up.

"A silver lighter—we shall see it right enough," Polly resumed her anxious murmurings, "if it turns up. It must be here—trodden in the sand. That's why they couldn't find it. But we shall find it! Oh, Betty, when I think what it means, if we do!"

"We're not going yet, Polly."

"Oh, no—no! I don't care if it lands us in another row. I'm out to save my own brother and Dave. And you, Betty— Yes, what?" For Betty had given a little cry.

"Something here, Polly!"

"What! Oh—"

"Got it!" shouted Betty, showing something silvery on an upturned palm as she jumped to her feet. "Got it—hurrah! Found, Polly—found!"

"Let me look! Oh, it is—it is!"

Together they rushed to the mouth of the cave to examine the find by a better light. It was Prefect Rennard's silver lighter right enough, as an engraved "G. R." evidenced.

"Let me have it—may I?" pleaded Polly, and her chum laughed:

"Of course—it's yours!"

"No, it isn't mine; it's Gerald Rennard's!" said Polly, with her grimmest smile. "And won't he be pleased that we have found it—I don't think! Oh, dear, I feel I'm going off my head! I'm afraid I'm a bit—excited!"

"How soon can we let it be known at Grange-moor?" questioned Betty. "But, of course, as soon as we let Miss Somerfield know! She can telephone."

Nor was it more than half an hour later when Morcove's headmistress was again ringing up the headmaster of Grangemoor School!

They'll Not Forget!

IN Study 12 Naomer was standing about looking rather "peevd."

Paul Creel, reclining in the best arm-chair, was perfectly indifferent to the fact that tea-things were still on the table, although they should have long since been cleared away.

"Zis is a sickener," exclaimed the dusky one. "Bekas, we don't know whether zey had finished tea or not when they went off like zat!"

"Pardon?" said Paula. She was using pocket-comb and mirror, and had not been attentive.

"I am talking about Betty and Polly, daffer! I suppose when they do come in zey will want to start again over tea? Bekas—"

"If I wera you, Naomer deah, I would cleah away, yes, wather! Pwesumably, Naomer, they will want to start pwep."

"Would you like to start prep.?"

"Er—pwesently, Naomer; pwesently, deah! All in good time. Er—"

"Would you like to clear away ze tea, perhaps?"

"Er—er—"

"Bekas, it won't clear itself away!"

"Twue, on weflection, howevah, I think—er—we might let the tea-things remain, Naomer. For the present, don't you know, yes, wather!"

"Bekas, I am sure they had not feenished. I only had half a tea myself, zere was such an upset,

and so I zink I might 'just as well start again, whilst waiting, don't you?"

But at this moment the voices of Betty and Polly were heard in the corridor. Then those two girls came in—with the news!

It was not made known at once. First, Naomer had to be sent to find Madge and Tess and other chums. The message with which Naomer was charged, as she dashed away, was to the effect that a wonderful thing had happened. Great sensation! "So queek, get ze jerk on and come to Study 12!"

The summons was answered with lightning speed. Even staid Madge Minden came rushing to Study 12. Pam Willoughby appeared, her serene smile meaning, this time, that she anticipated a joyous announcement. Tess Trelawney also hurried in along with the rest.

Then, when the captain's study was filled, the story of the last hour's dramatic happenings was told. Betty began it, but soon there were interjections from Polly that did much to carry the narrative to a speedy finish.

"So now you know—everything!" the madcap wound up gaily. "And isn't it wonderful—isn't it grand—the way it's all turned out in the end?"

"Splendid!"

"Weally mawvellous, yes, wather! Bai Jove!" "Corjus! Bekas, eet make that horrid old prefect sing small for ze bit at Grangemoor!" jabbored Naomer. "Ooo, how I would like to be there—"

"Now—this very minute!" Polly caught up the imp, glancing at a wrist-watch. "Gerald Rennard and Ginger Heldway have just got back to their school, I imagine. And so they have had the message that the Head would like to interview them!"

"Can't you see them," chuckled Betty. "now that the Head is informing them that a certain cigarette-lighter belonging to Rennard has been found in the burnt-out cave?"

"Collapse of Rennard the Fox!" laughed Helen Craig.

"And good job! Bekas—"

"Yes, I think it will be some time before Prefect Rennard gives Jack and Dave any more trouble," Polly nodded, swinging her legs as she perched on the table-edge. "For one thing, he won't be a prefect any longer—that we know! From what passed on the 'phone just now—oh, he is in for it properly!"

"And serve him right!"

"Yes, wather!"

Polly hopped down from her perch and walked about, too happy in her triumph to be able to keep still.

"Presently I am going down to use the 'phone! I've got permish. I'm only waiting until I can be sure of catching Jack, when he knows that everything is all right. He and Dave—saved—"

"Thanks to you two!" put in Madge. "Well, it's a wonderful bit of work you have done in the last hour or two—"

"Quite the Scotland Yard touch," remarked Tess.

"But, if you ask me," Madge continued earnestly, "the finer thing was when you two girls as good as took the blame in the first place, that being the only way then!"

"Never again!" said the madcap, with sham seriousness. "Not when one has a so-called chum like Naomer, to grizzle and grumble—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I didn't grizzle!"

"Didn't grizzle! You were one long—"

"No, bekas, all I said was, cef you had had me with you, eet would never have happened, and neither would it, bekas—"

Naomer finished on a prolonged "Zeeee!" her ear having been taken by the madcap. After giving that ear a last playful twist, Polly shot the imp into the lap of reclining Paula, who yelped:

"Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm going down to telephone!" announced the madcap, bouncing to the door. "I must do something!"

It was quite a lengthy chat she had with her overjoyed brother over the 'phone, for the lines were quiet this evening, and the exchange operators were indulgent.

Polly came prancing back to Study 12 at last with a full account of affairs at the other school. Rennard the Fox was a prefect no longer! His grim-visaged headmaster had icily informed him that Grangemoor School could not have prefects who did the things of which he, Rennard, stood condemned.

Ginger Heldway was heavily "lined" and gated for a month; but Rennard, as the major culprit—"and as a prefect, too!"—would have the far greater penalty to pay. And Grangemoor, like Morcove, was saying, "Serve him right!"

Jack and Dave were restored to their coveted places in the team for the "inter-schools." They would go to Plymouth, there to do their best with other Grangemoor fellows to uphold their school's fame for athletics against all comers.

Meantime, by special favour of the Head, and with the cordial approval of the headmistress of Morcove, both lads were to be allowed over, next "halfer," to take tea with Betty & Co.

And what a day that was for Study 12, when it came! What an order did the Barncombe Creamery have to supply for the great occasion!

The table was laid, all most daintily, with flowers in the centre, very early in the afternoon. Thus the chums were free to go down to the games field, there to take part in an important fixture which the Fourth Form could not have hoped to fulfil with success, minus Study 12.

Jack and Dave turned up just in time to see the close of play, and it was the way in which a winning goal was won for the Fourth Form that drew the subsequent remark from Polly's brother:

"One of these days, girls, you'll all be going to Plymouth!"

"Hope so!" said Polly. "I don't see why you boys should have all the glory, with your week at a grand hotel, all expenses paid, and win silver shields and medals!"

"But no silver lighters, eh?" Betty added.

"Yes, how is Rennard the Fox?" cried Polly, now that she and her chums were going off the field with Jack and Dave. "And did he—oh, did he send his best regards?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Rennard's a fox with his tail between his legs, these days," grinned Jack. "But I am leaving Dave to make a speech of thanks to Study 12 for the way it saved us twice. You know what a fellow Dave is for talk—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Dave let them have their laugh out, smiling gravely himself. Then:

"I shall have something to say, right enough," he quite startled the girls by remarking. "But not now."

"No, bekas—tea first! Hooray! Queek—queek!" urged the dusky one, darting behind

Paula to shunt her on the faster. "Queek, bekas, he is already upstairs; ze grandest, gorussest feed that ever was—hooray!"

"Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It became a moment for Polly to affect disdain of such levity. She put herself in step with Dave.

"What do you think of them, Dave, with all their nonsense?"

Then Dave realised that this, perhaps, was a good moment for saying his little say.

"What do I think of you, Polly, and of Betty? Polly, it was fine of you both! You have a brother who thinks more of you than ever,

Polly. Betty has a friend, in him, who would do anything for her. As for me, I— But I am not going to say anything about that—"

"No, don't, please!" laughed Polly, Nor did he—ever.

THE END.

You've enjoyed this grand story, haven't you? Next week **MARJORIE STANTON** has written another gorgeous, extra-long, complete tale, featuring Betty & Co., of Morceve School. It is entitled "**THE SECRET OF THE SCHOOLHOUSE**," and is one you must on no account miss!

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