

EXTRA-LONG, COMPLETE STORY OF MORCOVE SCHOOL WITHIN!

# The SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN 2<sup>d</sup>



## Caught in The Headmistress' Study at Midnight.

A dramatic incident from this week's grand, long complete story of Betty Barton & Co. of Morcove School.

Thrill Upon Thrill in This Intriguing, Long, ENTIRELY COMPLETE Story of the Chums of Morcove School.

# The Secret of the Schoolhouse!



## Polly Comes Back!

**B** RILLIANT headlights wavered upon the gravelled drive as a fine car purred through the darkness of the autumn evening towards the porch of Morcove School.

Polly Linton, madcap of the Fourth Form, peered out from that luxurious interior of the motor which she had all to herself, and she gave a rejoicing smile at sight of the great schoolhouse showing row upon row of lighted windows.

It had been thrilling to have special leave for a week-end at home at Linton Hall. It was proving just as thrilling to get back again to Morcove.

With a final circling swish the car pulled up, and the chauffeur jumped down from his place at the wheel, intending to open the door for Polly. But she was too quick for him.

"Splendid run—considering the roads."

"They were not too good, Miss Polly."

He reached out for Polly's week-end bag and would have portered it to the doorstep for her, but again she saved him the trouble.

"I'll take that, thanks; and so you can be off back again at once. Unless you'd like them to give you a snack. I can easily—"

"No, thank you, miss. I'd rather get back straight away."

"Very well then. Good-night, Fennings!"

"Good-night, Miss Polly!"

*Polly Linton's "new girl" was a joke to the whole of the Fourth Form—even to Betty Barton, the Form Captain, and Polly's best chum. But there was certainly no cause for mirth when Betty and Polly discovered who the "new girl" was and what she was doing in Morcove School!*

And, saluting, he climbed back to his seat at the wheel, whilst Polly gave a tug at the porch-bell.

Promptly the door was opened by a trim parlourmaid, and again Morcove's madcap was as breezy as ever.

"Hallo, Ellen! Thanks!"

"I'm a bit late! Have they been making a fuss?"

"Miss Everard was asking a few minutes ago, miss, if you had come in."

"I'll go and report in, pronto," remarked Polly gaily. "You needn't bother about this bag, Ellen; I'll take it up."

"Very good, miss."

The old familiar schoolhouse once more! Something in its atmosphere that was thrilling, just the same as when you got indoors at home after being away for a time. A quietude, and yet not a depressing silence. Nothing doing down here; there wouldn't be at this particular hour. The life of the place was all going on upstairs in the studies.

Polly went upstairs first to the private room of her Form-mistress. A tap at the door elicited a gentle "Come in!"

"Miss Everard—"

"Hallo, Polly—back at last; Late—very late!" was remarked with a frowning smile.

"I know! A bit late at starting; didn't seem able to tear myself away. And then

By

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the roads were shocking. Two hours to get here!"

The Form-mistress had swung round from her lamp-lit table, interrupted at some routine task of revising work by the welcome presence of a girl who was a large part of the life and soul of the Form.

Miss Everard had no favourites, but Polly, with all her faults and failings, was a girl to miss when she was away from the school.

"It's nice to have you back, Polly. Well, I hope the week-end that your mother begged for you has left you in great form for work."

"Oh, I'll go up to Study 12 in a minute and start at once!"

"You needn't do that," laughed the mistress.

"I shall not expect you to hand in any prep in the morning. So long as your arrival back doesn't prevent the others from doing their evening work."

"I'll see that it doesn't," Polly promised with her roguish smile. "Is everything the same, Miss Everard? I feel I've been away for ages."

"Just the same."

"Well, it's good to be back," Polly murmured, as she turned to pass out.

Her exit made and the door closed, it was with her usual liveliness that she pranced downstairs to get her suitcase and take it up to the dormitory. She would want some of the things out of her bag for the night, but unpacking could be done last thing.

Polly, indeed, would not have troubled about the bag at all at this moment, only she felt she had better give her co-tenants of Study 12 a few minutes longer before bursting in upon them.

Miss Everard had shrewdly inferred not much work would be done in that study after she had rejoined Betty Barton, the Form captain, and others. Polly had visions of Naomer Nakara—that study-mate who was Morcove's royal scholar—hastily providing refreshment at the journey's end. Any excuse was good enough for Naomer to provide a "snack" for her own impish self.

So to create a little delay Polly went up to the dormitory after discarding outdoor things, and then ran a comb through her hair in front of a dormitory mirror.

She had found the great room deserted. When she switched on a single light on entering it had made her pause to see all the beds, for somehow they conjured up mental pictures of all their occupants—her many Form-mates, jolly girls most of them, real "rippers," with the exception of two or three. And Polly never bothered about them.

Throwing down the comb, she turned away from the glass at once. She was not like Paula Creel—that beloved and elegant duffer of Study 12—to fall into a dreamy state of self-contemplation. Sounds from below now made it certain that prep. in a good many studies was finished.

Switching off the light when she was back at the doorway, Polly did one of her madcap rushes towards the spacious landing—and then suddenly her prancing step was checked.

The landing itself was only dimly lit; even so, Polly would have expected to recognise any other girl instantly encountering her just there. But the madcap had whirled round a corner to come upon a girl in Morcove dress whose face was very unfamiliar.

It was like a surprise encounter with a new girl—one so "new" that she was still very shy. The madcap stood dumbfounded for a moment at sight of a complete stranger.

With the length of that dim-lit landing between them, for a single moment each stared at the other. Then the girl whom Polly had never seen before—although she was a girl in school dress!—drew back swiftly, putting herself out of sight.

A swifter or more nervous retirement Polly could not have imagined—and all so needless, too.

What with the poor light and the rapidity with which that other girl had appeared and then vanished, it was almost like seeing a ghost. The ghost of a girl in Morcove dress!

"Well!" Polly gasped. Then she laughed. "What is there about me to frighten anyone? Yet she seemed to be scared stiff. But, of course, I do rather come round corners like no other girl."

It was along a passage serving another dormitory that the girl had hastily retired. Polly crossed the landing and walked the full length of the passage quickly, wanting to overtake the girl and make a joke of the surprise they had given each other.

The passage was unlighted, for the simple reason that girls hardly ever had occasion to come up here until bedtime. If they did need to run up to a dormitory, they could always switch on and then switch off again afterwards. That, as a matter of economy, was the rule in the school.

Did this new girl imagine nervously that she had no right at all to come up to this floor except at bedtime with the rest of the school?

"She must be a timid thing—afraid of making a bad start by a little thing like that," thought Polly. "But where's she got to now?"

Vanished!

It was the only word for the disappearance the girl had achieved. Polly looked into the dormitory served by this passage. Not there!

Switching on a light in that room only revealed its deserted state. The girl had not been standing about in there in total darkness.

In the end Polly could only conclude that a quite needless fear; a foolish sense of being liable to a reprimand, had made the new girl hurry down by a secondary staircase to regain her study on the floors below.

"Does she belong to my Form, I wonder?" the madcap speculated, going down the main staircase at last. "A new girl in the Fourth? No, that can't be so, for Miss Everard said that everything is just the same. Fancy Morcove having a new girl, anyhow, as late in the term as this. Some special reason, I suppose."

A few moments later all thought of the incident was being driven for the time being out of Polly's head. She was in the Fourth Form corridor, having all she could do to battle past playful schoolmates who were mobbing round her, dinning their chummy inquiries as to how she had enjoyed the week-end.

Very nice of them to want to know; but she was in a hurry to get to Study 12. Polly gave one batch of girls after another the slip skittishly, and with a final scamper got to her own study.

Her hand sent the door flying open and swinging round almost to the wall, and the chums in their own special way accorded a welcome to its adored madcap now that she was back again.

Is There a New Girl?

"A HA, our Polly!"  
 "Hooray! Bekas—"  
 "Bai Jove, Polly deah, wather late, what?"

"Oh, but I have been in ages," said Polly virtuously. "Only I wouldn't come to the study, knowing that you wanted to work!"

"Now zen, none of your nasty remarks!" cried dusky Naomer, whilst she ran at Polly to give her a hearty hug. "But—oh, of course, you will need ze refresher!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" pealed Betty and others, for Naomer had whipped about to make a dart for the corner cupboard.

"Have this chair, Polly dear," beamed Paula Creel, rising from the most "comfy" one. "And now, bai Jove, tell us all about your week-end."

"Thanks, Paula darling. Well—"

"How are they all at home, Polly?" cried Betty.

"Oh, splendid, thanks. Mother and dad sent their love to all. Hoping you are not working too hard."

"Work!" sighed Helen Craig, one of several juniors who had come to Study 12 as soon as they were free. "It has been nothing but work for us poor wretches since you went away. Not fair!"

"No; bekas eef you had been ze sport, Polly, you would have take us home with you for ze week-end."

"And where, in that case, would there have been any rest for me?" retorted the madcap, making herself very comfortable in the armchair. "Not to mention that you girls can't afford to miss lessons like I can!"

The chums protested noisily, Naomer's being a particularly shrill voice.

"Wha-a-at! Now you shan't have zis piece of cake, Polly! I will eat him myself! You better not have come back at all eef you have come back to in—insult us!"

All the same, the madcap still turned affectionate eyes on her, and Betty evinced special delight over the re-union. Seating herself on one of the armrests of Polly's chair, Betty let one arm fall lovingly about her chum's shoulders.

"It was not the same without you, Polly."

"No; bekas you are not a bad sort, Polly, so here you are!" Naomer relented, offering a second slice of cake, whilst retaining the first for her own consumption. "And what would you like to drink after ze journey—lemonade or a glass of milk, or shall I make you a hot drink?"

Naomer did not wait for an answer.

"Queek, hands up those for a hot drink!" she appealed. "Bekas we might as well all have one after prep."

Every hand went up.

"Clove or ginger?" was Naomer's next eager inquiry.

"Clove!"

"Ginger!"

"Clove"—Naomer gave her own casting vote—"bekas I like him best!"

And, having taken a bottle of syrup cordial from the corner cupboard together with a jug, she departed in quest of boiling water.

"It really has been a dull week-end for all of us," Betty remarked to Polly. "Saturday afternoon it rained like—well, like Morcové—so we couldn't get any hockey. What sort of a time did you have?"

"Oh, not so bad! Friday evening they had quite a nice dinner-party and a dance afterwards. Saturday was jolly. We had some of your rain, but that didn't seem to make much difference. I went for a good tramp in the morning with Jack—"



Naomer whirled in, yelling excitedly. "Betty everybody! Who is the new girl?" The chums gasped. It was the same question Polly had asked.

"Your brother was at home, too, then, for the week-end!"

"Oh, rather! He and Dave Lawder had leave from Grangemoor School, and they, of course, helped to liven things up. We had a round of golf in the afternoon, came in to tea round the fire, sat and talked until it was time to dress for the Lumleys' coming-of-age affair—"

"Bai Jove!" And Paula gave other listeners a glance that invited their opinion of such a crowded week-end.

"And so," Pam Willoughby said to Polly, "you have come back this evening feeling thoroughly tired."

"She doesn't look it," smiled Madge Minden, and Polly laughed and shook her head.

"But," she now changed the talk, "who's the new girl?"

To see the puzzled stares which this question called up made the madcap raise her own brows. "There is a new girl, of course?"

"Is there?" returned Betty, still looking astounded. "I don't know why you should say of course, Polly. It's nearing the end of term, and new girls don't usually turn up at this time." Polly got up.

"But, of course, there is a new girl—I don't mean in our Form, or Miss Everard would have mentioned her, surely. But I saw one just now." "Saw a new girl?" several of the chums echoed amazedly.

"Bai Jove—"

"It's the first we've heard of one, anyhow," laughed Betty. "What are you saying, Polly?"

"All this," said Helen, "comes of her going home to attend coming-of-age festivities."

"I think it's you," retorted Polly. "What are you all about not to know that there's a new girl in the school? In the Fifth, I take it, for she looked about the size for the Fifth, and she went in the direction of the Fifth Form dormitory when I met her just now."

"You must be dreaming," declared Betty, sadly shaking her head. "A new girl? No, Polly!"

"But I tell you I saw her! Upstairs—only a few minutes since!" the madcap protested. "It couldn't have been a new housemaid, when this girl was wearing school clothes."

A wondering silence followed, which Polly ended after she had resumed her seat.

"It was the funniest thing," she rippled. "I had just gone up to our dormitory to drop my bag there. Coming away, I almost ran into this new girl on the landing."

"But there is no new girl, Polly!"

"Oh, Betty—all of you! There is a new girl, and she must be very shy, too. Can't have been at a big school like Morcove before she came here. Took fright at sight of me, as if I were a mistress who would pounce. 'What are you doing here, girl? How dare you!' Polly acted a very irascible mistress. 'That's how the girl behaved—as if afraid she had done something dreadful!'"

These remarks, although so graphic, were received with incredulity by the listeners.

"Unless a new girl has arrived in the last hour or so, you must have dreamed it, Polly," insisted the Form captain. "We would have heard, even if she were not coming into our Form. There's not been a word about any new girl."

"You must get to bed early, Polly," one of them chaffed her. "These late nights! You must be so tired you couldn't recognise one of your own schoolmates when you met her just now."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I was not so tired," Polly gave back promptly, "that I didn't instantly see she was a complete stranger to me. Yes, girls, although it was only a poor light up there—"

"Hark! What on earth," exclaimed Betty, making a startled turn towards the door, "is the matter with Naomer now? Such excitement! Just hark at her!"

There was a moment, and a moment only, for the others to share Betty's astonishment at Naomer's voice. She had pelted down the corridor. Now the study door flashed open, and she whirled in fairly yelling:

"Betty! Everybody! You say, queek—who is the new girl?"

They turned to one another in fresh amazement. For it was Polly's question all over again!

#### Two of Them?

"YOU'VE seen a new girl, Naomer?"

"Yes, bekas—"

"Where—where?"

"Eet like this," panted Naomer. "I suddenly zink I will go up to ze dormitory and get my thermos flask, bekas I zink I will make myself a hot drink for last zing at bedtime. And so I went up ever as quiet, bekas you know zere would be a fuss eef zee were known zat I had ze winter warmer at bedtime. You know ze fuss there was about Paula Creel having a hot-water bott—"

"Never mind about all that!" dinned Polly. "What about this new girl?"

"I am coming to her! Bekas, when I was coming away from ze jolly old dormitory—Ooo, eef gave me such a turn! Eet was like seeing a ghost!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" pealed several of the chums; but Polly did not join in the merriment. She alone could understand, from her own experience, what a turn Naomer had been given.

These were the long, dark evenings now, and the schoolhouse was so huge, every little used staircase and passage could not be kept brilliantly lighted.

"Explain!" cried Polly.

"I have explained. Bekas zat is just what eet was like—seeing a ghost in a dark passage. But she was a new girl right enough, bekas—the clothes she wore. Only her face was—he was strange to me."

Polly turned to the others triumphantly.

"There you are! Either Naomer and I have both seen the ghost of a Morcove girl, or else there is a new girl in the place to-night."

"We'll soon decide which it is," Betty rejoined blandly, moving away to the door. "I'll go down and ask. I'll inquire of the Fifth Form captain, and then ask Ethel Courtway, our Head Girl. She will know, anyhow; but I simply can't imagine—"

Betty's voice faded out as she hurried away, leaving the other girls standing there in the study with varying expressions of puzzlement and incredulity. Naomer, who had returned without any hot water, set down the empty jug and her thermos flask, then snipped the clove cordial-nect.

It took away what little breath she had regained, but in spite of a fit of gasping and coughing, she resumed:

"Bekas—ugh, that stuff is strong! Bekas she was as large as life, I tell you! Only—stuff to give ze troops on a cold night!—she was gone as soon as I saw her! Ooo, in a flash, like!"

"Like a ghost, you say?" questioned Madge half-seriously.

"Yes, and eef you girls had been there you would have been scared stuff! But eet was a new girl right enough, with a pink face—"

"Pink?" gasped Polly. "Pink?"

"Yes, ever so pink!"

"Then it couldn't have been a ghost," said Pam serenely.

"It couldn't have been my new girl, either," declared Polly flatly. "The girl I saw had—well, just a usual face."

Paula was finding the great sensation rather too much for her. She sought the best armchair and lay back in it.

"Bai Jove, extwaaordinawy thing, what? Geals,

geals, theah is no twadition about the ghost of a Morcovian, is theah? I hope not!"

"Yes, bekas—eet not nice these dark nights. I shall not be afraid," Naomer added stoutly, "but some girls get ze wind up so easily. Eet all a question of being feet and having ze good apert—"

"Sh'rrp!" Polly silenced the dusky one. "You would go and see someone with a pink face! But I am convinced that I saw—oh, we'll wait till Betty comes back, then see if I'm not right!"

Less than a minute later Betty's quick and light step brought her back to the study out of breath with so much running about.

"No, there is no new girl," she announced, smiling. "I have had that from Miss Everard herself—if that isn't good enough?"

"Well!" was all Polly could say with a gasp. "Well, now!"

"So it really was a ghost! Oh, dear!" Helen exclaimed, pretending cold shivers. "A ghost with a pink face!"

"How wible!" groaned Paula. "If there must be an appawition, good gwacious, do let it have a wproper complexion!"

"Yes, and her lips, they were very, very, very—"

Naomer got no further with her supplementary details. The study door was ajar, and at this instant a head came round the edge of it—or rather a face.

And such a face! It belonged to a head right enough, but the girls could only notice the face. Pink! Bright pink, with carmine lips. As for the eyes—

"Wow!" the owner of this startling face emitted in a ghostly voice. "Gurr-ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came the silvery laugh of Hetty Curzon from just behind the mask in the doorway. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Is the captain of the Fourth Form in?" inquired Cora, who was speaking through the carmined slit in the mask. "I am an old friend of hers; sited ter go ter Council school wiv her in Ribbleton. Ow, I do fink it lovely to be a noo girl at Morcove, and Betty captin, too!"

Then with a shriek of laughter Cora fled. As usual, she had spoiled what might have been a good bit of fun by introducing the malicious touch.

Betty just shut the door with an extended foot, then turned round, good-humoured as ever. Any sneers and jeers from Cora were like water on a duck's back to the Form captain.

"So that's that, Naomer! So much for your new girl—or your ghost with a pink face."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Eet all very well, but—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" Oh, Naomer! And you, Polly!"

"Yes, wather!" said Paula quite indignantly. "Cwearing a perfectly needless scare, bai Jove! You two geals must both be—"

"Look here," said Polly, "I don't know anything about Naomer's vision. She only saw Cora. I suppose, acting about in that mask. But I—I tell you—"

"Oh, come, Polly!" bleated Betty. "Why not admit—"

"I never will!" protested the madcap with an emphatic stamp. "The figure I saw was an ordinary girl in Morcove clothes with an ordinary face!"

"Not pink?" grinned Helen.

"White as a ghost's, if anything."

"Then it must have been a ghost after all. That settles it."

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Weally, Polly deah—"

"Yes; bekas eef I was taken in, why shouldn't you have been? Bekas—"

"It was only Hetty Curzon creeping about in that dark passage with Cora," Helen offered the theory brightly. "They were both lying in wait—getting ready to scare—"

Polly turned upon the theorist.

"Do you think I don't know Hetty Curzon when I see her? I tell you the girl I saw was a complete stranger to me."

"Perhaps Hetty had another mask?" suggested Madge.

Polly shrugged and sighed.

"Oh, I keep on telling you it was an ordinary face. Those



"Isn't it a duck?" chuckled Hetty Curzon, admiring the grotesque dummy. "That'll be sure to annoy Polly!" Cora Grandways sniggered her approval.

masks are all—"

"Gwotesque, twue," agreed Paula, tidying her hair. "I have never yet seen one with the slightest resemblance to a pwetty face."

"Like yours, Paula?"

"Yes, wather! That is to say—"

But now the laugh was against Paula, with Polly only waiting for the merriment to subside before she began again.

"Seriously, girls, the moment I saw that girl—"

"Oh, no more," pleaded Betty. "Time!"

"Yes; bekas all ze while we are arguing ze toss we are missing ze drinks," said Naomer, going off again with the jug.

But although nothing more was said, the recent discussion had been sufficiently noisy to be overheard in the corridor. Presently when the bell rang the girls down to prayers, Polly discovered that she was the laughing-stock of the Form.

The same at bedtime. Naomer was felt to have

had good excuse for rushing to Study 12 with the sensational cry about a new girl in the school. The whole Form had now seen Cora sporting that mask. But Polly's refusal to admit that she also had been taken in in the same simple way earned her a great deal of chaff.

At last Miss Everard came up to say good-night and to switch out all lights. As soon as she was gone, and with the great room plunged into darkness, the teasing of Polly became all the greater, although carried on softly.

"Wow, let me get my head under the clothes," shuddered one skittish junior. "Who said ghosts?"

"Polly said she saw one, didn't you, Polly?"

No answer.

"She's asleep! Ha, ha, ha! Hey, Polly, wake up, here's the ghost again!"

"Ooo, look at its white face!"

"Yes, not pink—white!"

Another burst of titters.

"Shoo, go away!" someone ordered the supposed spectre. "It's cold enough as it is to-night, without being given the shivers by you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, do be quiet!" came from Polly at last.

"Ha, ha, ha! You there, Polly? We thought you had gone to look for the new girl. Wonder where they are sleeping her to-night?"

"Such a nice new girl! Just an ordinary face, but white, not pink!"

The dormitory found it hard not to shriek its laughter. Beds creaked as their occupants shook with all this merriment at the madcap's expense.

"Polly——"

"Yes, Polly, don't go to sleep yet!"

"The ghost will walk again at midnight!"

"In a dressing-gown this time! Same face, though; not pink——"

Flop! A pillow hurled by Polly smote the most persistent teaser full on the head.

"Now will you stop it, some of you?"

"My word, isn't she cross to-night?" remarked a voice in the darkness. "It hasn't done Polly much good going away for the week-end."

"It isn't that," said another voice. "It's seeing a ghost. I mean to say, when you see a new girl, when there isn't one——"

"With a white face, too!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Polly now got out of bed. She went round the dormitory armed with a bolster, and very effectually must she have dealt with the teasers, although single-handed. They let her off after that, and all was silence, except for the popping of a cork as Naomer unsealed her thermos to drink her hot clove-water before dropping off to sleep!

#### Strangers to Morocco!

ONCE in the night Betty Barton awoke with a start, and was it her fancy that a sound in the great schoolhouse had disturbed her?

What sort of sound it might have been, however, she could not decide. The night itself was perfectly quiet, the wind being down and a sharp frost prevailing.

She listened without even sitting up in bed to do so. Not the slightest sound now reached her, and soon she was dozing off again.

"Polly's ghost!" she smiled to herself drowsily.

"I must tell her in the morning; it woke me up."

But the morning brought other thoughts to the Form captain.

She decided very promptly that she had better

not make any joke about uncanny incidents in the night. There was quite enough teasing of Polly still going on.

Polly was in the sweetest of tempers this morning, blandly indifferent to all scoffing.

Miss Everard, presiding at the Form's breakfast-table, must have been puzzled by various dark allusions to new girls that were made from time to time. What was the joke amongst the girls this morning? Such frequent and mysterious fits of laughter.

Then in class Naomer was caught putting the hasty finishing touches to a lightning sketch done at the end of an exercise-book. Miss Everard, impounding this work of art, was left to wonder at its meaning. The picture of a girl, who might be a Morocco girl, staring at another who was standing in darkness caused by a lot of scribbles with a soft lead pencil.

Naomer had been drawing a picture of Polly "scared stiff" by the encounter with "the ghost." And for this work of art the dusky one was awarded fifty lines, to be done before she left the class-room at midday.

"Not zat I care a bit!" declared Naomer, coming out to her chums on the games field at half-past twelve. "Bekas Meess Everard didn't tear him up, any old how. And I am going to hang him up presently in ze study."

"Are you!" said Polly with her most threatening look.

At this moment Cora and Hetty came mincing past, and Cora clapped on the pink mask again as a reminder of last evening.

"Oh, it's stale now!" said Betty, whilst the others refused even to smile, although Cora had now adorned the smirking face with a pencilled moustache. "Run away and play!"

But Hetty, to please Cora, pretended to be vastly amused.

"Ha, ha, ha! You do look so funny, Cora! I dare you to walk right down to the gates wearing it!"

"Pooh! Come on, then!" spoke the Grandways girl, still sporting the mask. "I'll wear it into Barncombe, if I like!"

She stalked away to the drive, Hetty in step with her. Another girl would have realised that the joke was played out by now, but Cora considered it very daring to go swaggering down to the gateway wearing the absurd mask.

She hoped that Betty and the rest were watching her, secretly wondering how she could be so cheeky. But they were not. They were concentrating on a brisk bit of lacrosse practice.

Nearing the gateway, Cora indulged in some antics. She took Hetty's arm and even tried to get that crony to waltz with her.

Then suddenly two persons appeared in the great gateway—a woman and a girl—and as they looked towards the schoolhouse they saw the two girls behaving so absurdly, and they stared. Then they burst out laughing.

Cora felt rather foolish now. She whipped off the mask, grinning feebly, her own colour becoming almost as pink as the mask. From a dozen paces away the lady voiced an amused, ingratiating comment:

"You gave us quite a turn. A Guy Fawkes mask, is that it? How very funny!"

She sauntered forward.

"So this is Morocco School that I've heard about? My daughter and I are staying in Barncombe for a few days, and have strolled out this way. It is a big school, Eunice."

The daughter nodded. She appeared not to be greatly interested—perhaps because she was past school age.

"Would you like to see over the school?" Cora self-importantly offered. "I can get you permission—"

"Oh, not now, thanks; we haven't time!" declined the woman sweetly. "But before we leave the neighbourhood we might like to do that, Eunice. I like you better without your mask"—to Cora, now putting on her grandest air.

"Oh, well," laughed Cora, "it was only for a bit of fun!"

"Quite! Girls will be girls!"

"And Cora had some real fun with it last evening," Hetty remarked, glad of a chance to sing her study-mate's praises. "She was mistaken for a ghost by one girl. Another mistook her in a dark passage for a new girl."

Cora grinned proudly. "Yes, it was a great joke; but it has nearly caused a split between friends. Polly Linton still insists that it was either a ghost or a girl whom she had never seen before, and not me in my mask."

"Really?" smiled the woman.

"And the funny thing is," Cora chuckled on, "I had no idea that Polly Linton had almost run into me in a dark passage. I know I nearly bumped into the other girl, but not Polly. She must have seen me, though. Who else could it have been?"

"Of course!" smiled the lady. Her daughter was looking rather excited now, and Cora and Hetty, noticing this, wondered why. But the lady herself seemed to be aware of nothing strange in the behaviour of Eunice.

"It's a great life for you, I'm sure. Well, we must get back to lunch, Eunice dear. And some other day, perhaps, we will ask to be shown over the school."

In the act of turning to go the speaker could no longer ignore her daughter's tense expression.

"Come, dear! My daughter, you know," the lady confided to Cora and Hetty softly, "suffers from nerves. She is rather strange at times. And I'm afraid that mask must have upset her, you know. Ha, ha! Well, good-morning!"

And they passed back to the road, falling into subdued but eager talk directly they were alone.

As for Cora and Hetty, they suddenly decided to make for Study 12 whilst Betty & Co. were still playing lacrosse. The next few minutes found the pair rigging up a dummy in the Form captain's study.

Some old clothes had been routed out, and these, with the addition of the sixpenny mask, resulted in an effigy which Cora labelled:

#### POLLY'S NEW GIRL!

From the doorway Cora and Hetty stood looking back at the dummy, all asprawl in the armchair usually reserved for Paula Creel.

"Isn't it a duck!" chuckled Hetty.

"Ha, ha, ha! That'll rattle Polly!"

Then, while the cost was still clear, they fitted for their own study just round the corner.

#### The "Ghost" Walks!

MORCOVE'S deep-toned hour-bell was striking the midnight hour. Bong! On and on—bong!—until the twelfth stroke hummed away into the night-time stillness.

It was a sound too familiar to all in the great schoolhouse for any to be awakened by it. There were even girls who were known to sleep soundly

through that other bell which was rung on purpose to wake them up.

But Betty Barton became suddenly wide awake at this instant in the Fourth Form dormitory. She knew not why it was until, sitting up and peering around, she saw that a bed next to hers was empty.

Polly's bed!

Then the Form captain, after sharply rubbing her eyes, became aware of her best of chums standing over by the door—pausing there in a startled manner.

Out of bed jumped Betty, to nip across quite silently to the madcap.

"What's the matter, Polly?"

"Sh!" gestured that girl, although Betty had whispered cautiously enough. "It's my new girl, Betty!"

"What!"

"Or the ghost walking again," whispered the madcap, smiling grimly at Betty in the darkness. "I am going to find out which!"

"Polly dear, don't say such things. Be serious."

"I am serious, Betty. If you ask me, it is a serious state of things. Someone has come creeping down from the attic!"

The words sent a positive thrill of excitement through Betty.

"You gave me a turn," Polly whispered on, "suddenly waking up just as I was creeping away. I suppose I must have disturbed you somehow, Betty. But nobody else is awake?"

"No," was Betty's relieved conviction, after peering all over the dark room and listening intently. "Wait for me, Polly—only a sec."

"I'll wait outside."

"Right!"

Softly the madcap crept away, whilst Betty darted for a dressing-gown and put it on. Bedroom slippers went on just as quickly, and then she padded out of the dormitory to find Polly waiting at the head of the stairs.

"I'm right," Polly asserted under her breath.

"I've heard, whoever it is again, creeping about downstairs."

"Not a burglar, Polly?"

"Burglar—no!" The madcap derided that idea. "Don't you understand, Betty, it's all explained now? When I saw someone whom I thought to be a new girl the other evening, it was a girl hiding in the school!"

"Phew!"

"Must be so," insisted Polly. "And she is wearing Morocco clothes to make it safer for her if she does get glimpsed by accident—see? It came upon me in a flash just now; that's the meaning of it all!"

"But—but who on earth can the girl be? Why—why should she hide in the schoolhouse?" "Goodness knows!" shrugged Polly. "But we may find out, perhaps. Come on!"

"Yes," Betty agreed. "You'll make for where you think the last sound came from, Polly?"

Nodding, the madcap began the descent of the main staircase with her chum.

They kept one behind the other so as not to be both on the same stair at the same time, which might have caused a board to creak. It was with great relief that they descended flight after flight without making the least sound.

But if they were as silent as all this, whoever else was abroad in the house to-night was also just as silent. Not a sound came to the straining ears of the two girls.

Frequently they stood perfectly still so as to



listen all the better. No use. They had to go on again unhelped by any fresh sound, Polly relying for guidance upon that faint noise which had come up to her when she was waiting above for Betty on the landing.

Thus the two girls got down to the ground floor at last, and there, at the foot of the stairs, Betty felt bound to whisper an astonished remark:

"Was it as far down as this, Polly?"

"I think so," the madcap whispered back. "She blundered into something down here, anyhow. That's when I heard her."

They stood peering about, listening as intently as ever.

"I do wonder who it is!" breathed Betty. "If she doesn't show up soon, Polly, to-morrow, anyhow, we can go up to the attics and—"

A nudge from Polly rendered her chum suddenly mute.

Hark! Yes, someone was coming now. The soft swish of a door being closed gently had been audible, then the very faintest footfall of someone who had emerged upon a passage.

On tip-toe Betty and Polly crossed to the darkest corner of the hall, where a table offered to hide them if they crouched behind or under it.

Polly was under the table instantly, whilst Betty went on all fours, safely screened.

Not a moment too soon!

Even as they resumed their watch from those concealed positions, their eager eyes beheld the dark form of a girl advancing slowly, warily from the passage.

She was in the day attire of a schoolgirl, but Betty discerned at once, as Polly had done the other evening, that this was no pupil of the school.

Her own anxious eyes seemed to be directed mostly in the direction of the staircase. Evidently she had no suspicion that she had been followed downstairs already, but she was in great dread of being taken by surprise.

Once, whilst making a nervous pause, she did look all round the dark hall, but the table hid Betty and Polly very effectively. They were not peering out then, but presently she moved on again, and they ventured a peep.

Then they saw her tip-toeing into another passage—one that led to the headmistress' private room.

This was a circumstance that set the hearts of Betty and Polly beating faster than ever. A thief? It began to look like it. Except for some thieving intention, why should this mysterious unknown be going towards Miss Somerfield's room—where there was a safe containing valuables, as the chums well knew.

Like a spectre had the girl come and gone, and now Betty and Polly were able to say in whispers what could not be said with the eyes.

"She came away from the library, Polly."

"Yes; that was the library door she closed behind her."

"The headmistress' room is along that passage she has just gone into. I say, if she has gone to that room—"

"We'll go after her now and catch her there. We must do something, Betty."

"Rather! I don't like the look of it."

On hands and knees they crept clear of the table, then stood up and tip-toed towards that passage into which the mystery girl had passed a few moments since.

Before entering it one of them peered to make

sure that the girl was not still in the passage. But she had gone, and, what was more, she was certainly in Miss Somerfield's room with a light switched on.

The line under the closed door was a line of light.

An exchange of excited looks, and then the Study 12 pair crept along the passage. It was a broad one, richly carpeted, and they easily got to that door with its "PRIVATE" in bold lettering, without making the slightest sound.

Betty's hand went then to the knob of the door, but Polly plucked her by the sleeve of her dressing-gown deterrently. It was Polly's idea to look through the keyhole first, and she crouched to do this.

After a moment she came erect again, turning to Betty with a most astounded look.

"What do you think, Betty?" the deep whisper came. "She is looking at a newspaper!"

"What?"

"Looking through 'The Times'!"

In the name of mystery, what did it mean?

"Oh, I'm going in!" breathed Betty.

And next second she had sent the door wide open and was across the threshold with Polly beside her, and the mystery girl was letting the newspaper drop from nerveless hands, whilst she turned eyes filled with horror to both girls.

#### The Case of Evelyn Norris.

THERE was dead silence. All three girls were as still as figures in a tableau.

Then Betty closed the door behind her, and by that action she broke the spell that was upon the others.

She and Polly moved towards the girl who was no pupil of Morcove, although she wore the Morcove dress.

"Now, please," Betty said tensely and quietly, "who are you? What are you doing here at all—and in this above all rooms—at midnight?"

"It isn't the first time I have seen you," Polly joined in the challenge. "You have been hiding in the school, haven't you, since Monday, anyhow?"

The girl tried to speak but could not, and suddenly she collapsed into a chair and buried her face in her hands, crying softly.

For a few moments she sobbed on like one overwhelmed with grief and shame. Then with a weary sweeping of the tears from her eyes—a gesture that was pitiful to see—she raised her drooping head and looked at her challengers.

"I mean no harm to anybody. I am not a thief, if that is what you think," she faltered.

"But what then does it mean?" Betty implored.

"To begin with, who are you?"

"I—I am not going to tell you."

"Oh, in that case—"

"I daren't, I daren't! Oh, please," was the sobbed entreaty, "don't let it be known! If you are the only ones—"

"It looks as if we are," Polly interjected. "But can you expect us to do nothing about this? You don't appear to be a—a dishonest girl. All the same, we ask you!"

The mystery girl gave a sigh that acknowledged their right to demand the meaning of her actions.

"All I was doing—looking at the latest newspaper I could find," she protested sadly. "Only to see the Shipping News—to try and find out if father's boat is reported."

Betty and Polly simply stared.

"Oh!"

"Father is on the way home to England, you see, and I—I am so anxious, so longing for the hour!" She wrung her hands. "How to hold out until he does turn up I hardly know. And if—if his boat should be days late—it is such a long, long voyage!"

She gulped.

"This is a bad time of the year at sea, isn't it?" she submitted with appeal that went straight to the girls' hearts. "And dad is everything to me. If only—oh, if only he were with me now!"

"Are you all alone, then?" Betty whispered feelingly. "No one belonging to you? But you must have a home somewhere."

The girl drew nearer.

"Listen, and I will tell you," she quavered. "I have had to run away from the relations with whom I was living. I lost darling mother a few months ago, and then my Aunt Ada came to have charge of the old home and me. And there has been a cousin of mine as well. My Cousin Eunice, Aunt Ada's only daughter. Oh, it has been awfully unhappy for me." the poor girl added distressfully. "They have been so unkind."

"As if it were not bad enough for you to have lost your mother," was Polly's sympathetic rejoinder. "But how do you mean—unkind? Nagging? Bullying?"

"And worse than that," came the woeful answer. "I had to see things being sold I knew father would want to keep. They have been doing just as they like, and it's a shame! Things belonging to mother herself have been turned into cash. Just one trinket I was able to save—a very, very valuable one. I was determined they should not have that, so I—I've got it on me now. Look, here it is!"

She put fingers to her neck, and, pulling on a band of ribbon, brought to light a ring.

Threaded on to the ribbon, it had evidently been worn locket-wise but out of sight ever since she fled from home.

Now the ring sparkled its rare gems at Betty and Polly in the electric light.

"They shall not get hold of that!" the girl said in a fierce whisper. "It's the engagement-ring that father gave mother years and years ago. They would like to sell it, making out that it was buried with her; but I am not letting them!"

"Oh," Polly gasped, "and I don't blame you. I don't wonder, do you, Betty?"

"At what this girl has done? Not I," said the Eorm captain with emphasis. "It's awfully hard for you," she addressed the girl.

"But I am thinking of daddy," was the sighed response. "I suppose I could have put up with the bullying for a bit longer, knowing he was on the way home. But it came to a—to a sort of crisis at last. Unless I went away, taking the ring with me, terrible things would have happened. So I gave them the slip and vanished. That was a week ago. For the first day or two I was at my wits' ends how to carry on. Then, in my wanderings, I found myself at Morcove, and the idea came to me to hide in your school."

"And this," said Betty, fingering the girl's



"What's the matter, Polly?" Betty whispered, urgently. "Someone has come creeping down—from the attic! I think it's my 'new girl,'" was Polly's serious answer.

tunic, "you were thinking you'd have a better chance of passing for a Morcove girl?"

"Was it very wrong of me?" pleaded the girl. "After all, I didn't steal it. I found it in an out of the way place upstairs, obviously no longer wanted—worn out. So I—"

She broke off, looking uneasily towards the door, and then the Study 12 pair faced that way also, heart in mouth. But they had heard no sound, and it must have been purely the girl's nervous fancy that a sound had come.

"I feel so guilty," she explained forlornly, "although I have done nobody any harm. I can't come out of hiding and tell people. Aunt Ada would get hold of me again—get me back, telling all sorts of untruths. And Eunice—she's another!"

Betty suddenly picked up the newspaper and sought the shipping news.

"The name of your father's boat? Have you seen it in the list?"

"I hadn't time," was the answer. "You came in just as I started looking. It's the Ruakehu, from New Zealand. I saw ten days ago that she was reported from—"

"Here we are!" Betty exclaimed, almost forgetting to guard her voice she was so excited. "Left Tenerife last Saturday."

"Oh, then the boat is on time!" the girl said joyfully. "Only a few more days—why, just three or four more from now, and then—"

She looked as if she were bringing her hands together with a soft clap, but instead she suddenly put them forth, laying one on Betty's shoulders and one on Polly's.

"Don't give me away, will you?" she implored. "Every word of what I have said is

true—it is! Let me go on in hiding, won't you, for just these few more days? You don't know how grateful daddy will be when he knows. As for me, I'll never be able to repay your kindness."

Betty and Polly had only to meet each other's eyes to know that, as usual, they were of one mind. This poor girl must be helped.

"You have been hiding in one of the attics?" Polly whispered. "But how have you managed for food?"

"I brought some with me. I haven't touched any belonging to the school. Only crept down for water."

"You poor old thing!" Betty murmured. "Well, for the present, at any rate, you must go back to the attic. What's your name, by the way? You didn't tell us."

"Evelyn Norris."

"We mustn't hang about down here, Evelyn," the captain continued. "Polly and I will go before you upstairs as far as the dormitory landing, and then—well?"

"Oh, I wonder," Evelyn Norris exclaimed, "would one of you take care of the ring for me?" "You," she said to Betty, at the same time taking the trinket from her neck, "wear it for me, will you? In case—in case Aunt Ada gets hold of me again."

"She's not going to do that," Polly declared. "But let Betty have the ring. Betty is our Form captain, you know. And now I've an idea," the madcap whispered on eagerly. "I'll slip along to Study 12 and get you some food to take with you up to the attic, Evelyn."

"That is awfully good of you," was the ardent response of the fugitive girl. "But, before we part for the night, one word more. Look out for a tall woman with a mole on the left cheek—a tall, thin woman. I don't know." Evelyn quavered, "but Aunt Ada may have tracked me to this district. If you see a woman of that description with a fair girl—"

"What's the daughter like?" questioned Betty eagerly. "Anything special to help recognition?"

"No; only very thin eyebrows."

Evelyn added a few more details relating to her aunt as well as her cousin, and Betty and Polly did not fail to memorize them. They would have to be on the look-out after this.

The light was switched off, and without one more word all three girls crept along to the stairs and went up with extreme caution.

At the third floor landing Betty waited with Evelyn whilst Polly hastened to Study 12 to raid the corner cupboard. In a minute the madcap was back, and then a large Genoa cake changed hands.

It would have been very unwise of the girls to exchange even the softest of whispers just there. But, in spite of the darkness, Evelyn managed to convey with her eyes all that she wanted to say in gratitude and joy at having found such friends.

And Betty and Polly in return were leaving the girl in no doubt as to their determination to do all they could for her as they crept back to the dormitory and their beds.

#### Danger Ahead!

"WHAT ze diggings! Ooo, who has had a whole Genoa cake out of ze cupboard?"

"I have," madcap Polly answered Naomer's sensational inquiry, coming into Study 12 just as it was voiced. "I suppose I could if I wanted to, as it was my cake, anyhow."

"Ze fact that you bought him does not—"

"Sh'rr! Think about your work for a change!"

"But eet not fair, bekas when you talk of me being greedy, what about you, Polly, coming down in ze night, I suppose, to have a go at ze corner cupboard?"

"Betty and I, that's what we did," Polly breezily confessed. "But do you know the time, Naomer? Books together at once, instanter, pronto!"

"School again," grumbled Naomer. "Most tving, I agwee," sighed Paula, floating in at this moment. "Howevah, it's only for the morning, geals."

"Yes, cheer up!" cried Betty, rushing in to seize such books as she would want during morning lessons. "And this afternoon, after games, we'll bike into Barncombe for tea at the Creamery."

Naomer could cheer up right enough now. "You better, whilst you are about eet, buy anuzzer Genoa cake! Bekas—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Betty, no more changing countenance than Polly had done. "All right, we'll lay in a good store, won't we, Polly?"

"It might be as well," the madcap agreed demurely. "Things do so vanish!"

Naomer caught Betty and Polly exchanging amused glances, and could not quite make out what they meant.

"I suppose you zink it funny that you managed a midnight feed without me. Well, I am disgusted!" the dusky one stated, and marched out.

"You bring my books for me, Paula!"

"Bai Jove, the geal has a nerve!" commented the elegant one; but with her usual willingness to oblige she finally took Naomer's books along with her own down to class.

As Naomer had said: School again! And how Betty and Polly were going to get their heads into the work this morning those girls simply did not know.

The affair of last night was occupying their minds. For sheer strangeness it was like something dreamed in the night. But it had really happened right enough. And the whole thing was going on still even now. The two chums must begin work in the orderly class-room, aware of that girl being still in hiding in the school.

Forget her for a single moment even—how could they? They had premeditated to see her safely through this trying ordeal.

Whether they had induced her or not to rely on them for help, the two girls were determined, anyhow, that the girl should have that help.

By every means in their power they must aid her. At the very least they must contrive to keep her well supplied with food.

And to-day that beautiful gem ring was in Betty's keeping. Time after time, whilst she worked in class, she felt the ring lying snugly beneath her blouse suspended by the loose ribbon that went about her neck.

A great responsibility to have been given charge of a trinket simply priceless in the eyes of Evelyn's widowed father. But Betty was far from wishing that the task of treasuring it had not fallen to her.

At "break" there was not a moment's opportunity for Betty or Polly to debate the situation. They were with all the other girls, getting the usual exercise.

Out of school at midday, however, Betty and Polly managed to get together.

"What's it to be, Betty? Are we going to tell the others or not?"

"Just what I have been asking myself, Polly. I hate to keep anything from Madge and the rest. But—"

"Somehow, the fewer in this the better, don't you think?" was Polly's grave argument. "And I really don't like the idea of Naomer knowing. She's a darling, but you never know what she may blurt out."

Betty gave an uneasy smile.

"That's true enough, Polly. Yet to tell others and not tell Naomer seems hardly nice. Besides, would Evelyn wish so many to be in the know? Oh, let's keep it to ourselves, Polly!"

"I'm sure it's best, Betty. After all, there's not much fun in being in the secret. I don't know what my work was like in class this morning."

"It was better than mine, I hope."

Betty gave a cautious glance around.

They were aware of Hetty and Cora sauntering towards them, obviously bent on being annoying. As pointedly as they could the Study 12 pair turned their backs upon that approaching couple and sauntered away.

A few moments later Polly noticed her clum putting a hand to the neck opening of her blouse as if feeling for something.

"Haven't lost it, Betty?"

"Gracious, don't talk about losing it, even in fun!" Betty laughed softly. "No, I've got it right enough. The ring isn't the worry. If only we can guard Evelyn Norris until her father lands."

"But here's a snag, Betty," whispered Polly glumly. "Even when his boat has got in, how is he to know where to come to find his daughter? Every hour many be precious, and yet there he will be—"

"Not if we let him know, Polly!" exclaimed Betty swiftly. "And that is what we have jolly well got to do. We must somehow!"

"Wireless?" breathed the madcap, her face lighting up. "A Marconigram, don't they call it? You can wireless private messages to passengers on ships at sea."

"For any post office; and that means, in our case, from Barncombe," Betty rushed on with the idea. "This afternoon, Polly, when we go into town."

Then the irritating voice of Cora Grandways hailed both girls from behind.

"Hey, whoa, you two! I must speak to the captain!"

Betty and Polly took no notice, but walked on. Before Cora had time to give another jeering cry, she found her own crouching exclaiming:

"Why, Cora, look—there's that lady again with her daughter!"

"What? Oh, come to see over the school this time, have they?"

These loud remarks, falling upon the ears of Betty and Polly, caused them to glance towards the gateway. It was no great distance from them; as for the visitors who had excited comment, they proved to be going close by the Study 12 pair on the way up the drive.

So close, in fact, that instantly Betty and Polly observed one noticeable thing in the very handsome face of the woman.

And then her daughter.

For a moment Betty's and Polly's hearts seemed to turn right over.

The great fear of Evelyn Norris was already being realised. Her trail had been picked up.

Here were the very pair from whom the poor girl was trying to escape.

Here, within the very gates of Morcove School, was this woman and her daughter! And Evelyn herself was even now lying concealed in the attic.

#### Outmatched by the Madcap!

"MORNING, girls! I wonder if the headmistress would allow us to see over the school?"

The mother and daughter were going up to Cora and Hetty, recognising those two as the girls spoken to yesterday. But Betty and Polly meant to intervene if they could. As if they imagined that the inquiry had been addressed to them, they stepped briskly towards the visitors.

"Morning!" both girls managed to respond pleasantly enough, but—oh, how alarmed they felt! You wish to—"

"The lady was speaking to us," came Cora's self-important remark as she came up with Hetty. "Oh, yes"—with great sweetness—"if you and your daughter will come with us it can soon be arranged! This way!"

"Excuse me," Betty persisted in sheer desperation, "as a Form captain, perhaps I had better be the one to—to—"

"Oh, are you a Form captain?" cried Evelyn's Aunt Ada ingratiatingly. "How nice to know! I and my daughter passed yesterday, but had no time then. We would like to see over the school, however. A friend of mine is anxious to hear of a thoroughly reliable school for her daughter."

"That's a whopper, I'm sure," thought Polly. "Phew, these two are hot on the scent, and what Betty and I are to do—"

"Will you come with me then?" Betty suggested calmly.

"Thanks so much; perhaps we had better? Much obliged to you others, all the same," smiled the woman with a parting smile for Cora and Hetty. "Come on then, Eunice darling."

Polly breathed freely again. She felt that it was something for Betty to have sailed in and taken the visitors clean out of the hands of Study 12's standing enemies. With luck Betty might be directed to show the mother and daughter round the school, in which case any prying questions could be safely parried.

"You coming, too, Polly?" the Form captain called back, after going a few yards with the visitors.

"Oh, go on, Polly!" sneered Cora savagely. "Trust the captain to put her spoke in! Bah, talk about officiousness! Did you ever know anything like it, Hetty?"

And there was more to the same effect as Cora walked away with her crouching, whilst Betty ran to catch up with Betty and the visitors.

All the way to the porch the woman was making admiring comments; but Eunice was not so skilful at dissembling. Neither Betty nor Polly was blind to the fact that Eunice seemed a prey to thoughts and anxieties which prevented her from taking any real interest in the school as a school.

Then, as it happened, they all encountered Miss Everard at the porch. She was coming out, as her practice was, to watch some of the girls at their games. At once the woman with the mole on her left cheek introduced herself to the Formmistress, and so Betty and Polly got the name: "Mrs. Waterfield."

That might be the real name, or an assumed one. In any case, the woman and her daughter

were going to be, in the eyes of Betty and Polly, "Aunt Ada" and "Eunice."

"With pleasure," Miss Everard answered the request about seeing over the school. "Betty, you might show them round? I'm sorry I cannot very well—"

"Oh, we mustn't give you any trouble!" protested Mrs. Waterfield. "If these two girls will be so kind, that will suit us admirably."

Betty could not resist the temptation to steal a glance at Polly and even smile. As for the mad-cap, she very nearly winked back. So far, good!

They would just show the visitors round, and then show them out! As for any casual but artful questions, "Aunt Ada" and "Eunice" little knew that they were to try such pumping on the very last scholars likely to supply information.

That it was their idea to "pump" their guides soon became apparent. Very artfully Mrs. Waterfield engaged Betty in talk, leaving Eunice to keep more with Polly during the round of the school. Mrs. Waterfield, as a blind, no doubt, was all talk about what she was being shown, whereas Eunice soon began to ask Polly random questions.

"Did I hear you called Polly? Then I suppose you are the girl mother and I heard about yesterday."

"Oh, did you?" returned Polly blandly.

"Yes; those other girls were telling us about a bit of fun with a Guy Fawkes mask," Eunice smiled. "You got taken in by it the other evening, I fancy? You thought you saw a new girl in the school, although there wasn't one?"

Calmly Polly laughed.

"Yes, I made a mistake there. It was not a new girl."

"It must have given you a turn! We were told that you thought it was either a new girl or a ghost. And you'd hardly expect to meet with a ghost in a big school like this," Eunice remarked casually. "Although I have heard of one school that was supposed to be haunted. Moreover isn't like that?"

"Oh, no!"

"You never hear any creepy sounds by night?"

"No sounds that can't be accounted for," was the glib reply. "I know what you are getting at!" Polly thought. "But I'm a match for you, Miss Artful!"

A little later, when they had been up to the dormitories—but not up to the attics—it was just as evident again why Eunice remarked:

"This school stands in a very lonely position, though. Don't you ever have trouble with tramps and such-like? I suppose it would be easy for anyone to break into the school after dark?"

"But why ever should they?" laughed Polly.

"Oh, well, at this time of the year," Eunice explained carelessly, "some homeless person might want to find shelter."

Betty looked round just then, walking in front with Mrs. Waterfield.

"I'm going to show them Study 12, Polly, before they go."

"I see!" And Polly laughed to herself. That "before they go" was lovely—as plain a hint that could be given that the visitors must not expect to hang about all day.

"This is a fair sample of the studies," Betty remarked, throwing open the door of Study 12 a few moments later. "They're all much alike for size and so on."

It was not surprising, perhaps, that Mrs. Waterfield and her daughter, looking into the study,

beheld a certain girl reclining in an armchair, using a pocket-comb and mirror,

"Bai Jove!"

"How do you do?" Mrs. Waterfield smiled and nodded towards startled Paula, and then to Naomer at the corner cupboard, of course.

"Well, my dear, but what a fine study, to be sure! Such a good light, and a splendid view."

"And zis is ze corner cupboard," said Naomer, feeling that visitors must be shown anything of real importance. "Where we keep our own things for tea in study, you see. Only zere is not much in him at present, bekas Betty and Polly came down in zo night and—"

"H'm!" Polly coughed.

"And helped themselves to a whole cake!"

"Oh, did they!" laughed Mrs. Waterfield. "Hungry, I suppose!"

But Betty and Polly realised that another reason for that midnight raid on the cupboard might be inferred, and they wished to goodness that Naomer had said nothing.

"You are a little pest, Naomer!" exploded Polly, returning alone to Study 12 a few minutes later. "What did you want to say that about the cake for? Ugh, you washout!"

The madcap, however, had got over the worst of her exasperation, believing that Aunt Ada and her daughter, Eunice were even now going away no wiser than they had come. Betty had taken them to the headmistress for a how-do-you-do, and after some brief talk the mother and daughter had doubtless departed.

What was Polly's dismay when, just as the gong for dinner was whang-whanging, Betty came to her quietly, announcing:

"Nice thing, Polly; they've got themselves asked to lunch!"

"Wha-a-a-at!"

"Miss Somerfield has invited them to lunch with her, and they'll be here all the afternoon. 'To see the games' is the excuse, but we know what their own game is, don't we?"

"Oh, goodness!" gasped Polly. "What shall we do?"

"It's a licker, no mistake. You and I have got to play in that match this afternoon. And will those two be merely looking on all the time? I doubt it!"

"Can we warn Evelyn?" whispered Polly.

"Can we smuggle her out of the school?"

"In broad daylight? Madness to try," was Betty's opinion. "And if we tell her it will only worry her more."

"What, then, can we possibly do?"

"Come down to dinner, Polly."

And, that being the only thing to do at present, down to dinner they went!

#### From Bad to Worse!

**I**N the face of this critical situation, Betty and Polly debated again by-and-by whether or not to let their best chums into the secret.

The original reasons for keeping silent still prevailed, however.

"It's not as if Madge and the rest could do what we are prevented from doing," Betty reasoned gravely. "They are all booked to play in the match, and so—"

"I tell you what," broke in Polly with her grimmest look of determination, "the moment I see a sign of danger—even if it's in the middle of the match—I shall drop out. That's all. I shall—well, you'll see how I shall work it!"

But Betty could guess, and she smiled

approvingly. The same sort of ruse that was in her chum's mind had occurred to Betty herself. Oh, between them they would manage. It was the Form captain's famous slogan coming into force again. "We'll manage!"

So the harassed pair kept the whole anxiety to themselves, and their chums were in blissful ignorance of Betty and Polly's agitated state of mind when the time came to take the field against a visiting team.

Madge and the rest were as ignorant as were all the rest of Morcove's scholars of what was going on in the school.

One bit of relief Betty and Polly had at the start of the hockey match. They knew for certain that Mrs. Waterfield and her daughter had been able to accomplish nothing up till then. Their lurching with the head-mistress had led on to a mere sitting about in the drawing-room until this

same. Neither fellow-players nor onlookers could have found fault with those two members of the home team.

Out of the corners of their eyes they seemed to be watching, and felt compelled to watch, those two faces in the crowd all the time to be sure that they were still there.

And then suddenly, in the second half of the game, one of those faces was no longer there!

At a moment when the battle on the hockey-ground was at its fiercest, the score one-all, Mrs. Waterfield could be seen standing beside Miss Somerfield still, but Eunice—she was gone!

Instantly Polly carried out that resolve which such serious need had dictated. She was suddenly asprawl on the turf, apparently overthrown by one of those mischances that will occur and no one to blame. As she struggled up, looking temporarily crippled, she made urgent signs for play



Even while the chums wondered who the visitors could be, Betty and Polly noticed one significant thing. The woman had a mole on her left cheek! Supposing she asked to see over the school!

moment, when Miss Somerfield had said: "Well, shall we go out to watch the match?"

It was a most important fixture. For that reason Betty had felt it impossible to seek a pretext for dropping out, being captain of the team, or of letting a first-class player like Polly drop out. Perhaps, too, the importance of this match had induced Miss Somerfield to invite the casual visitors to stay on to watch it.

A great crowd ringed the field. Girls, mistresses, and even many of the domestics were there as onlookers, together with lots of people who had come out from the town. Yet once Betty and Polly had picked out the faces of Mrs. Waterfield and her daughter from amongst so many, the two girls seemed to see those two faces and no others.

Nor did the captain and the madcap seem able not to see those faces, never mind how fast and furious the game was going. Betty was trying hard to do her best for the team; Polly the

to go on. But there was a momentary pause, an inclination to rush to her aid.

"No, don't bother about me," she called out, limping away. "It's nothing. But I—I'm afraid I must drop out."

Betty ran to her—was the first to reach her. A look passed, and then the captain flashed round to give a reassuring:

"Carry on! We'll play one short, that's all. Up, Morcove! Up the Form!"

The game was resumed, whilst Polly had to encounter the inevitable scores of sympathisers as she came limping into the crowd. If only—oh, if only no notice could have been taken of her, when she knew that Eunice was even now going to the schoolhouse in the company of Cora and Hetty!

Miss Everard was one who had hurried to meet Polly as she came off the field.

"Ankle, Polly? Hard luck!"

"Oh, it's nothing!" the madcap disclaimed again with perfect truth. "I'll just go indoors,

I don't want anybody to come with me. I—I can't stand any fuss."

This caused some laughter, with a note of admiration in it. Polly was allowed to have her own way, and to go limping alone to the schoolhouse, sympathisers imagining that she would soon be resting.

But it was little rest that Polly took the moment she was inside the almost deserted schoolhouse. Nor was there any limp to hamper her activities.

As agilely as ever, but without a sound, upstairs raced Polly. Even as she mounted she heard the voices of three girls in talk coming down to her, Eunice, with Cora and Hetty!

"I think the school is in such a wonderful position," Eunice said, "I'd just love to see the views from the very highest part."

"Take her up to the roof, Cora, and show her, shall we?" Polly heard Hetty Curzon suggest. "Up the attic stairs and out by the skylight."

"It would be a bit of fun," chuckled Cora. "Yes, let's!"

The madcap was clenching her teeth as she came on behind that trio, unbeknown to them. Just as well that she had left the games field!

So it had become a case of now or never with Polly. She had to warn Evelyn, and more than warn her—get her away in broad daylight after all. There was only a minute in which to do this, probably, and that minute misspent would end in calamity.

Warily Polly mounted to the dormitory floor, pausing there because she could hear Eunice and the other two making great fun of their activities on the floor above—the attic floor.

They were going up the iron ladder to the skylight, Cora leading. For Polly there was the maddening wait whilst much fooling about went on; then she heard the girls' voices from the open air. They had emerged upon the flat roof, but were keeping quite close to the skylight.

Safe to go on again now? Polly had to chance that. A cautious peep, and she simply flew up the last flight of stairs to the attic landing. It had been in her mind all the time that Evelyn had made her own attic door fast on the inside, although there was no key.

Would the girl know that it was a friend if she tapped softly? She must have heard Eunice's voice just now, and so there might be the dreadful fear that it was Aunt Ada who was outside on this landing.

Polly tapped upon the door.

There was no reply. Not a sound.

Again she rapped with still greater urgency.

"Evelyn, Evelyn!" she whispered in sheer desperation. "Come out, quick—come! This is Polly speaking. Quick, quick!"

And still there was no response.

"Oh, Evelyn," Polly whispered frantically, "don't you hear me? At any moment your cousin may—"

The rest went unsaid. Suddenly the attic door had swung open, and there was Evelyn, ready for flight, her arms laden with possibly everything that pertained to her hidden life. And Polly's face lit up at sight of the girl's burdens.

"I heard," Evelyn whispered tensely. "I only stayed to collect everything in case."

"Yes, I understand," panted the madcap. "Just as bad for them to find traces of your having hidden there. But come with me now—downstairs—quick! I'll go first!"

At that instant there sounded footfalls on the roof just above the girls' heads. Then faintly the

voice of Eunice came down through the skylight.

"Wonderful views! If I were a Morcovie girl I would want a study as high up as possible. Could one make a study out of an attic?" she craftily joked.

Polly was creeping down the stairs, followed by Evelyn. Both girls were in full view from the skylight above. Heart in mouth, they divided their nervous glances between that skylight and the stairs they were descending.

Would they get down and round the corner in time? Would they run into somebody else?

But the fates were in a benign mood. Unseen, Polly and the hunted-looking girl gained the Fourth Form dormitory, and in a flash Evelyn was safely hidden.

Then Polly sought a chair by her bed, and as a pretext for being in the dormitory at such a time, took off a shoe and a stocking, examining an ankle for bruising.

Five minutes after this she was discovered massaging that ankle by Cora and Hetty when they brought Eunice to the dormitory. How very interested Eunice was in the school, to be sure. She must see everything a second time.

"Hallo, what's the matter with you?" Cora spoke across to Polly contemptuously.

"Nothing!"

In any case, the trio were not inclined to stay and sympathise. They went away, and then it was Polly's joy to have quite a long chat with Evelyn in secret before aiding that girl's safe return to the attic.

Loud cheering was in the air at the moment when Evelyn again shut herself in that dark and dusty lair. The cheers were from onlookers at the match now that it was ended, but to Polly, creeping downstairs again to make for Study 12, it seemed as if this was one great "Hurrah!" on account of Evelyn's marvellous escape.

Betty was unable to come up to the study directly after the match. As captain of the home team, she was kept in talk with the visitors' captain, and had to see that team drive away, Morcovie according their friendly rivals a parting cheer for having given them a good game. But Morcovie had won!

"We won!" cried Betty, bursting in upon Polly in Study 12 at last. "We won, Polly!"

"I could have told you that," retorted the madcap, for she had had the result from Naomer already. "You were right when you said that we would manage."

Then Betty knew that there had been a second victory of quite a different kind for Study 12 this afternoon. As plainly as Polly dared in the presence of others who were not in the secret, she was telling Betty that the situation had been saved.

"Mrs. Waterfield and her daughter have gone at last," remarked Betty casually; and only the presence of Naomer and a few more chums prevented her from adding: "Thank goodness!"

It was to be only an hour or so later, however, that Betty would encounter the enemy again.

Tea over, Betty cycled into Barncombe along with a few members of the coterie. Polly was not one of them, for she could hardly go for a cycle ride after crocking up on the games field.

Whilst Naomer haunted the Creamery, and whilst Madge, Pam and Helen dived into various shops for things they needed, Betty visited the central post office. It was when she was coming

away from this building that she found herself face to face with "Aunt Ada" and Eunice.

Mrs. Waterfield conferred her sweetest smile. Would the woman have been able to manage such a sweet smile, Betty wondered, if she had known that a Marconigram was even then on its way to a wireless station with this urgent message for a certain passenger on the Ruakehu:

"Inquire for your daughter Evelyn at Morcovo School on landing. Lose no time."

Which message was signed simply: "WELL-WISHER."

#### Is Fate Against Them?

THREE mornings later Betty surprised that most popular of parlourmaids, Ellen, by asking her: Could she get hold of that day's "Times"?

"The 'Times,' miss? There's Miss Somerfield's copy, of course, in her room. It will go to the library when she has finished with it."

"Could you borrow it for me now, Ellen—for just a minute? I only want to look up something."

"Certainly, miss!"

All the same, Ellen remained considerably astonished that a Morcovo junior should wish to consult the famous daily. Some account of a wedding in which Betty's people were interested, perhaps. That was the only explanation which Ellen could think of; and she was wrong.

Betty waited about whilst other girls were making the most of the mid-morning "break" in the open air.

"Thanks, Ellen!"—when at last the paper came into the Form captain's eager hands.

Now! Now! Now! to see if there was any mention of the Ruakehu in the shipping news. No peace of mind for her or Polly until the father of the girl in hiding had turned up at Morcovo.

Mrs. Waterfield and Eunice were still in Barncombe; still haunting the neighbourhood, feeling that there the scent was hottest. Yesterday Cora and Hetty had been to tea with Eunice at the private hotel in Barncombe where that girl and her mother were staying. And how could there be any safety for Evelyn whilst

"Ah, here we are!"

The excited exclamation escaped Betty as she picked out the wanted vessel's name in the shipping list. Then her face fell.

The Ruakehu was due at Tilbury on Monday next. Nothing to be hoped for before then.

It was a bit of a blow for Betty. She had wondered if the vessel would call at Plymouth; but no such luck. There must be this week-end to be got through somehow, with all the special risks to face that were sure to occur.

"Much obliged, Ellen!"

"Thank you, miss," responded the parlourmaid, receiving back the paper.

"Betty!" came the eager cry for her at this instant, and she turned round to find that Polly had run herself out of breath questing her.

"Been looking for you, Betty! I say"—and the madcap's voice dropped to a whisper as they went off together seeking privacy—"a nice thing, Betty! I've just heard Cora and Hetty saying they've got Eunice coming to tea this afternoon."

"What! Oh, help!" said Betty.

"And Mrs. Waterfield is coming along later to fetch Eunice in a car. Jolly artful," Polly commented fiercely, "the way they have taken advantage of Cora and Hetty's readiness to be pally!"

"It would be Cora and Hetty to add to our troubles," frowned Betty. "Polly, we don't know how much the mother and daughter may have gleaned from those two girls. Cora and Hetty were there to tea yesterday—"

"Yep! Anyhow, even if nothing has been gleaned, it means they'll hang about the school getting inside—"

"On a Saturday afternoon, too! My word," breathed Betty "we have got our work cut out now. And I have just been reading the Ruakehu doesn't dock until Monday, and even then it's Tilbury."

"At the other end of the kingdom. Oh, goodness, why couldn't it be Plymouth—or Southampton at the worst?"

"New Zealand boats always dock at Tilbury, I fancy," said Betty. "Never mind, we'll manage!"

"Well, we've managed so far, anyhow!" was



"Oh, I wonder if you would take care of this ring for me?" Evelyn Norris pleaded. "In case—in case Aunt Ada gets hold of me again!"



Polly's grimly smiled rejoinder. "There she is still"—in a deep whisper—"up there in that attic."

"And here is this still!" added Betty, giving the merest touch to indicate something hanging locket-wise about her neck. "If they get her by any bit of bad luck, Polly, they don't get that. The ring is saved from their hands, anyhow."

Then Betty went with Polly to spend the next few minutes with the rest of the chums before the bell should ring the whole Form into class once more.

"Going to rain. Going to be a wet halfer," was now the gloomy prediction on every lip; and this did not help Betty and Polly to get rid of grave misgivings.

A wet half-holiday would mean an indoor afternoon, girls resorting to all manner of frolics to pass the time away.

Only let some skittish junior suggest a game of hide-and-seek, and how much longer would Evelyn's secret life in the attic remain unknown!

Nor were the two chums blind to the fact that Cora and Hetty felt it to be another score over Study 12 that they were having Eunice to tea.

The obnoxious pair so bragged about what they were going to do, and made such a parade of their preparations, there was left no room for doubt; somehow or other they had divined that Eunice's presence in the school was an annoyance to Betty and Polly.

To and fro, to and fro in the study corridor Cora and Hetty were going. They passed and repassed Study 12, sometimes together, sometimes separately. Now Cora would scamper by shouting that she was going down to see if the Creamery order had been delivered; and now again she was coming back with it.

"Simply pouring, Hetty," was one remark made just outside the closed door of Study 12. But I expect Eunice will come in a car."

"Lucky we invited her when we've got nothing else to do. We'll keep her as late as we can."

"Oh, rather! Might have some music downstairs. I don't see why Madge Minden should always monopolise the piano!"

Madge was in Study 12 when this screechy remark was made. Pam and the others looked at her and smiled.

Polly went to the window, hoping to see some signs of a clearing-up. But to westwards the sky right down to the level horizon formed by the dark sea was as black as ink. As if this were not trying enough, Polly beheld a Barncombe taxi turning in at the gateway. Eunice, for a certainty—and the time only a little after two!

Again Cora and Hetty came away from their study round the corner to go scampering past, making loud remarks.

"How nice of her to be so early!"

"That gives us such a long afternoon with her, doesn't it?"

"What ze diggings is the matter with those two?" exclaimed Naomer, feeling rather bored herself. "Zey keep on—"

"Sh'rrp!"

"Good gracious, can't I spik?"

"No, you can't!"

"Well, I shall spik if I like, Polly, bekas what else is there to do? Look at us, with nuzzing to do but wait for tea-time, and zen we are caught with only three cream buns. Which reminds me," added the dusky one, "zere is another cake missing since yesterday, and some Sweeess-roll. I'd like to know who has had him!"

Polly knew that if she looked at Betty now, Betty would be looking at her, and they would both have to grin. This was the comic side of the



"Although this ring is not mine, it is certainly not yours, Eunice Waterfield!" Betty said fiercely. "And I will not give it to you!"—

great secret. Naomer's puzzlement over further inroads upon the larder that were not traceable to her own "appertite."

Suddenly they all heard Cora and Hetty coming along from the stairs, bringing Eunice with them.

"Would you like me to invite the captain to join us, Eunice?" sniggered Cora opposite the door of Study 12.

"Oh, I'd rather we were just to ourselves," was the response, given with well-affected seriousness.

"That's it; just the three of us," came the dying-away voice of Cora as they passed round the corner.

An instant later she was raising that voice of hers against her own sister, as Study 12 was bound to hear. It was a hard life at the best of times that Cora led her sister Judith. Now something

had occurred to give Cora an excuse for bullying in front of Eunice.

"Judy—oh, you wretched nuisance, you! Now look what you've done!" the angry screechings reached Study 12. "After the trouble Hetty and and I have taken with the tea-table!"

"I'm sorry, Cora—"

"Sorry! What's the use of being sorry? Oh, get out of here—get out! I'll give you 'sorry'!"

"But it really as a pure accident, Cora. I'll stay and—"

"You won't stay! Get out, I tell you!"

Sounds followed that made Study 12's blood boil. Poor Judith was being almost thrown out of that other study in anything but a playful manner. Yet, as if the whole thing were a joke, Hetty and Eunice pealed with laughter.

Flump! Bang! Then came Cora's own heart-



—"It is not mine, but it belongs to my mother!" Eunice stated, and amazed gasps broke from the other occupants of the study.

less laugh, along with more mirthful peals from her companions.

Betty did not need to be looked at by Polly and others before she quitted Study 12 to inquire into this. The Form captain was in her sternest mood as she walked round into the lobby serving the study from which Judith had been so violently ejected.

"Judy!"

The poor girl was holding a hand up to her bumped head, nearly crying. Her face was spasmodic with the struggle she was making to get over her shaken state.

"Dash it all," Betty said, her lips tightening still more, "this must end! There has been too much—"

"Oh, Betty, don't—don't go in! It will only mean—"

"But I am going in," insisted the captain furiously, and with the words she sent the door wide open before her. "Cora!"

"Well, what do you want?"

"I just want to let your visitor understand," Betty answered biting, "it's part of my job to see that no girl is bullied by another."

"Oh, your job—"

"Least of all by a sister!"

"Well, that's enough—"

"It isn't enough. If your friend can treat it as a joke, then I don't think she is—"

"Hang what you think!" flared out Cora. Passionate strides brought her close to Betty. "Shall I put you outside as I put my sister? I will if you are not careful!"

"And if you are not careful you'll go with me to Miss Everard!" was Betty's calm counter-threat. "The whole Form is feeling that it's high time you were—"

"Clear out!" Cora fairly yelled, and in one of her bursts of insensate rage she flew at Betty, trying to push her backwards into the passage, but Betty resisted.

Cora's fury was fed by the presence of Eunice, whilst Betty was equally determined to suffer no humiliation in front of that girl. Thus it was a very real scuffle that went on for a few moments, and then it only ended as abruptly as it did, because Cora so had hold of the captain that somehow—the ring came to light!

It was Betty's wild dismay to realise that the other's hand had clutched at the neck-opening of her blouse, and that the ring had been dragged out by the ribbon on which it was slung.

Cora could not have known what she was doing, except that it was something spiteful, when she dragged on the ribbon until it broke and the ring fell to the floor and rolled about before the very eyes of Eunice!

"Hallo, what's that?" the girl jerked out in sudden great excitement. "Oh, it's the very ring that—"

"Let it alone!"

Betty's was the furious voice now. It had rendered her almost frantic this disaster that had come about—the very worst that could have happened, she felt. Of all girls, Eunice was present—staring down at the ring.

Pouncing swiftly, Betty snatched it up, whilst Cora and Hetty were so staggered by this strange outcome of the scrap they simply stood agape. But Eunice rushed to the door, barring the way out to the captain.

"Wait a bit; not so fast!" Eunice said tensely. "That ring is not yours!"

"Nor is it yours!" gave back Betty. "So mind your own business! Out of my way—"

"I won't! I won't move from here until you have handed over that ring!" was the cry from Eunice that fetched amazed gasps from Cora and Hetty. "It belongs by rights to my mother!"

"What!" screeched Cora. "Never!"

"You are a little fibber, Eunice Waterfield!" panted Betty. "I know all about the ring—"

"Then it's just as mother and I have suspected!" Eunice struck in triumphantly. "We guessed it was so. Cora—and you, Hetty! This captain of yours as been aiding a runaway from home; hiding her in this very school! The fact that Betty Barton is in possession of that ring—"

"But—but," burst out Cora, looking as if she

would go off her head with joy at these accusations against the captain. "Whose ring is it, then?"

"I'll tell you," said Eunice, whilst the doorway filled with chums of Betty's from Study 12. "Listen all! I have a girl cousin whose mother died some time back. It became my mother's duty to go and take charge of the home, and we have been there for that purpose. But this cousin of mine has been very troublesome. Last week she ran away, and we have been looking for her ever since. She took with her that ring!"

"So that your mother should not sell it," Betty rejoined calmly. "And you are not going to have it to sell. Neither you nor your mother shall—"

"Oh, is that what you say Betty?" put in Cora. "You think you are as big as all that, do you, because you are Form captain? Eunice, don't worry; we'll soon get the headmistress to make Betty hand over—stolen property! You'll get in a row about this, Betty."

"Think so?"

But Betty's heart was heavy within her. She knew that Miss Somerfield might very well feel bound to accept the Waterfields' version of the affair, treating poor Evelyn as the wayward, tiresome girl that she was made out to be. And Evelyn's father still at sea!

That was the calamity—the very one which they had striven so hard to avert. Discovery had come about whilst Evelyn's father was still so far away.

"Let's go to the headmistress, then," Eunice proposed with a hard smile. "Mother will be along presently to satisfy the headmistress. But can't you imagine what a bad girl my Cousin Evelyn is to have run away with the stolen ring and to have hidden in this schoolhouse!"

"What!" chorussed listeners at the doorway to whom this was a bigger surprised than ever. "A girl hiding in the schoolhouse? Oh!"

"Oh, so that explains the 'ghost' of a few nights ago!" chuckled Cora. "And ever since then Betty and Polly have been helping her. All right, you two; you're for it now, I guess! Hee, hee, hee!"

"And serve you right!" added Hetty sweetly. "I mustn't be expected to pity you, even if you get expelled!"

"Which is just about what will be the punishment," exulted Cora. "I mean to say, the Form captain! Can't have that, can we? Expulsion for both of you!"

"No, bekas—"

"Oh, you, shut up, Naomer! We've got more to do than listen to you. Where is this girl who has been hiding in—"

"Here I am—here!" a new voice asserted itself. And suddenly, to the increased dismay of Betty and Polly, and to the wilder surprise of others, Evelyn Norris was pushing her way into the crowded study.

#### Just Fancy!

**EVELYN!** It was with acute distress that Betty and Polly voiced the name; but Eunice only grinned a derisive:

"Hallo, Evelyn! You feel it's time to chuck it in, do you? You wait till mother gets hold of you!"

"I'm not afraid to face her; not afraid to face anybody!" was Evelyn's spirited cry, whilst Morcove girls remained aghast. "I'm only afraid that

these two girls are going to get punished unless—I can plead for them."

"Much good will that do them!" laughed Cora. "You really imagine that the headmistress will ever listen to you?"

"Look at yourself!" cried Eunice scornfully. "Dusty and grimy—"

"She can't help that!" flashed Polly hotly. "I know as well as Betty that Evelyn has had a rotten time all for the sake of—"

"Rubbish!" jeered Eunice. "And, look here, Betty Barton, I want that ring!"

"You're not going to have it!"

"Then we really must go to the headmistress, that's all!"

"Come on, then—to the headmistress!" Evelyn herself agreed eagerly. "And if she does make us hand over the ring—"

She broke down for a moment, having to brush a sudden flood of tears from her eyes. Then:

"We'll have done our best, at any rate. I know that I have done all I could do for dad's sake. And as for Betty and Polly—oh, it will be a wicked shame if they are punished! But I won't let you be!" she said tearfully to the chums. "I came out of hiding just now, hearing all this row going on, and knowing that I—I must help you, you, who have done your best for me."

There was a sudden, dramatic silence. Even Cora's malicious tongue was still. Upon all those girls who had squeezed into the study or who were crowding in the doorway, a spell had fallen. Betty broke it by making a sign at last that she wished to go at once to Miss Somerfield with Evelyn and Eunice.

"Don't you come, Polly," the captain advised gently.

"But—"

"You stay back, Polly, and tell the chums."

"Yes, bekas—"

"Sh'rrp!"

Polly, however, conquered her own inclination and finally went back to Study 12, intending to explain at last to Madge and others, and then to await Betty's return.

But there were so many interruptions by girls who wished to hear the strange story, and there was such anxiety to know what was now taking place in the headmistress' room, soon Polly went downstairs, taking quite half the Form with her.

Cora and Hetty turned up—not to mingle with girls who were waiting about with Polly, bombarding her with questions all the time. The Morcove friends of Eunice were, of course, a couple to themselves, only waiting to glory in condemnation of Betty and Polly's part in the affair.

Downfall of the Form captain! Hooray! She and her best chum in deep disgrace!

Suddenly the waiting girls in that outer hall heard a car arriving. For Polly, at any rate, it was a sound to make the heart sink. Mrs. Waterfield! Here she was, and so another minute would find her supporting Eunice in all the plausible, untrue reasons why the ring should be handed over at once.

If only—oh, if only Evelyn's father were here! But there must be two days yet, at least, and in the meantime the ring would be disposed of.

Tr-r-ring! went the porch bell.

Polly turned her back to the outer door. She did not want to see it opened, disclosing that odious woman. Everything had gone wrong in the end, and it was almost more than she could bear.

"Morcove School?" inquired a masculine voice,

the moment the door was opened; and Polly flashed round. "The headmistress—is she in?"

"Yes, sir," someone answered. "But—"  
"I am Mr. Norris, and I wish to inquire about a Marconigram that came to me at sea."

Polly's head spun. She almost shouted, as she ran between other girls towards the door:

"Mr. Norris! Evelyn's father?"  
"Yes, that's right. But where is Evelyn? Can you tell me—can anybody explain—the meaning of this?"

A Marconigram passed into Polly's hands, and her excited eyes read:

"Inquire for your daughter Evelyn at Morcove School on landing—lose no time."

"My boat had mails to land at Plymouth, by tender. I came off the Ruakehu by the tender that fetched the mails away. That was a few hours ago. I have come full speed by car from Plymouth—"

"And you are in time—oh, you are just in time!" was Polly's wild cry of relief and joy. "Mr. Norris, I can take you to Evelyn now, this moment! She's with the headmistress, and— and— Oh, but I can't explain! You'll soon understand! This way, Mr. Norris—this way!"

Those who thronged the hall did not wonder at his looking utterly flabbergasted as Polly, with such excited cries literally dragged him towards the headmistress' private room. He certainly did not understand at present!

He and Polly, they came to the door marked "Private," and for the first time in her life at Morcove the madcap threw open that door and burst in without any formal tap.

"Evelyn! Here's your father—here's your own daddy!"

It was a cry that cut short all talk that had been going on.

Betty, as much electrified as any, turned round and saw a sunburnt gentleman hesitate in the doorway, then saw him and his daughter rush to each other's arms.

"Daddy! Daddy darling!"

"Evelyn—Evelyn dearest!"

And there they were, widowed father and motherless daughter, heart to heart at last!

At that moment another car was purring towards the porch.

When it stopped opposite the outer door, Mrs. Waterfield alighted. In spite of the pouring rain,

she seemed to be in very good spirits—as if expectant of a certain satisfaction resulting from this further visit to Morcove School. Her gloved hand went to the bell-press, but she was spared the trouble of ringing. The door came open sharply, and there was her own daughter, Eunice, looking pale and unnerved,

"Mother—"

"Why, what's the matter, Eunice?"

"Come away—quick! He's here!" whispered the girl shakily. "Evelyn's father—he is with Evelyn now!"

Mrs. Waterfield voiced an incredulous "What?"

"It's all up," said Eunice frantically. "He has gained a couple of days by landing at Plymouth with some mails. A telegram did it—from one of those girls."

For a moment Mrs. Waterfield was transfixed, going as white as death in the face. Then she made the hastiest sign to her daughter, and five seconds later they were both in the car—driving away!

The Study No. 12 chums did not incur one word of censure from their headmistress. On the contrary, and to the rage of Cora Grandways, they were even praised for what they had done in a very trying situation.

How could Miss Somerfield have been angry with the girls, when Mr. Norris himself was so emphatic? If Betty and Polly had never aided his daughter; above all, if Betty had never sent off that Marconigram—what a different ending to the whole affair there might have been!

Evelyn's father was to find out how true it was that Mrs. Waterfield had been making away with many valuables; but the ring—the ring was saved. And the measure of his gratitude to Morcove on that account proved the truth of something else that Evelyn had said. That ring was the dearest thing in the world to him, next to his own daughter.

It seemed to Morcove that Mr. Norris knew not how to be sufficiently grateful to those who had been his daughter's friends-in-need. He thanked them again and again. He obtained Miss Somerfield's permission to stand them a special treat, one day soon, along with Evelyn; and still he felt the repayment to be inadequate.

But those who knew Betty and Polly best were quite sure that the one joyful moment, when father and daughter were reunited, had given them all the reward they would ever have wished.

THE END.

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