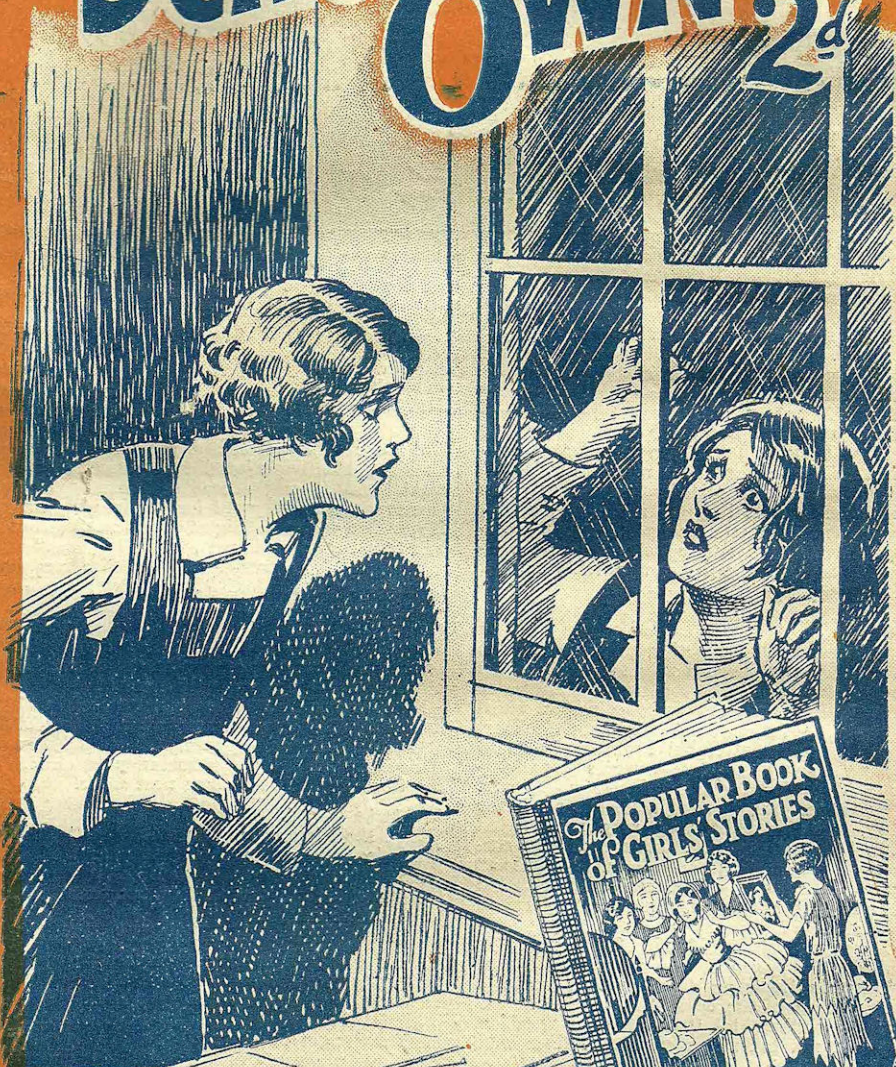


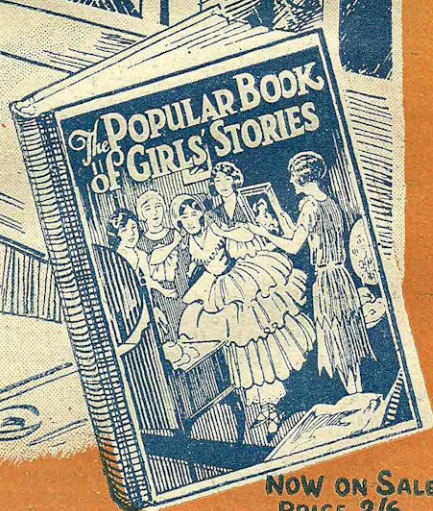
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THE PROBLEM JUDITH MUST FACE!



By **MARJORIE STANTON**

Judy is Mystified!

THE girls of the Fourth Form stood in their desks as Miss Somerfield, headmistress of Morcove School, came into the class-room.

Then the Form-mistress signed to the juniors to resume their seats.

"How are the girls working, Miss Everard?"

"Oh, quite well, Miss Somerfield!"

"That's right," the headmistress smilingly addressed the Form. "It is practically the last week of term, girls; let it be the best!"

Many a pair of eyes sparkled, whilst an all-too-audible whisper came from that dusky imp, Naomer Nakara, who was Morcove's royal scholar.

"Bekas, next week—ze hols. hip-pip!"

"Go on with your work, Naomer," counselled Miss Everard, to which the irrepressible junior was heard to answer:

"Wiz ze greatest of ze pleasure!"

A ripple of laughter went through the class; then pens were dipped again. It was evident that the headmistress had not looked in, as she sometimes did, to take the Form to task about something. She and Miss Everard chatted softly together, and that was all.

Until, on the point of withdrawing, Miss Somerfield remarked in a less subdued voice:

"Oh, by the way, I have a note to go across to the bungalow—if you have some girl, Miss Everard, who deserves to be let out a few minutes before mid-day?"

Instantly there were some amusing attempts to "catch the speaker's eye," as it were. Some juniors sat up sharply. Polly Linton, madcap of

the Form, coughed. Naomer Nakara did not hesitate to put up a hand. But Miss Everard blandly ignored this frantic signal, as she sent a roving glance amongst the desks!

"Judith Grandways."

Perhaps it was not simply because this girl always behaved well that she was being chosen. Now that Judith set down her pen and came away from her desk at a sign from the headmistress, it could be seen that she looked as if a run in the open-air would do her good.

"Will you go for me then, Judith, taking this note across at once to Cliff Edge bungalow? There may be an answer."

Judith nodded, receiving the note at the hand of Miss Somerfield, and they passed from the class-room together.

"A moment, Judith!" came just as she was hastening away to the cloak-room. "Are you feeling quite fit to-day?"

"Oh, I'm—I'm quite all right, thank you, Miss Somerfield," was Judith's rather confused answer; but neither that assurance nor a forced smile could leave the kindly headmistress quite satisfied.

"Has your sister Cora been behaving better, Judith, since I gave her that severe talking-to?"

No longer is Judith Grandways at Cora's beck and call; no longer will she allow Hetty Curzon to bully her! But the Fourth Form at Morcove little knows what is the reason for this change in Judith. They cannot guess that in telling Judith she is no longer Cora Grandways' sister, Hetty has armed her for the greatest fight of all her young life!

I hope so! Ill-feeling between one girl and another is always to be deplored. But when it comes to one sister being unkind to another—well!”

“Things are—going to be different now, Miss Somerfield,” said Judith.

“I should hope they are! If not— But there, it's no use my telling you to come to me at any time. You would never make any complaint yourself, I know! Well, run along now,” finished Miss Somerfield, with a smile.

A minute later, Judith was striding down the school drive, between two playing-fields that would soon be thronged. Games would follow school-work, as soon as the school chimes tolled twelve o'clock.

The December day was dry, bright, and energising. Coming in cold for Christmas! Seasonable weather, very likely, for Yuletide, with snow and hard frost! “And what shall I be doing?” Judith wondered—not as other girls were constantly wondering; these days, in happy uncertainty.

They were fortunate ones who had only to wonder what surprising arrangements their parents might be making. Something promising a novel treat, of course! But as for Judith herself—

Not without reason was she in doubt as to where she would be, before another week was out. Such a blow had befallen her, only a couple of days ago; a blow so devastating to her entire future—ah, she must try not to think about it! And so, to give her mind to something else, she glanced at the envelope containing the note which she was taking to Cliff Edge bungalow.

It was addressed simply to: “Mrs. Cardew”—a name that meant nothing to Judith.

She could only suppose that the lady was some friend of Miss Somerfield's who had come to stay at the bungalow for a little while.

The owner of the place made a practice of letting it furnished, and it was constantly knowing a change of tenants. Being the only dwelling along the top of the great cliffs of Morcove, it appealed to those seeking a quiet spot, with grand air and magnificent views.

Judith could remember the bungalow being taken by the lawyer-guardian of Dave Lawder, when that boy—Jack Linton's best chum at Grangemoor School—had been so ill. Dave had convalesced at Cliff Edge.

And now the low-built but spacious residence came in sight to Judith as she left the school half a mile behind. There was the bungalow, not far off now, lying between the road to Barncombe and the edge of the giant cliffs.

She would have started to run the rest of the way, but the recollection of Dave's time at the bungalow had given her a train of thought about that lad—quiet, serious Dave, as popular with the girls of the Fourth Form as was his fun-loving chum, Jack Linton!

She was thinking of the tremendous change that had come about in Dave's life, within the last few days. His future, like hers, had been changed utterly and with the same dramatic suddenness. But in his case there was only cause for joy. He had been brought up almost from infancy as an orphan by that lawyer-guardian of his.

Until a few days ago there had never been the faintest idea that a parent of his might still be living. And then, suddenly, a lady had turned up at Grangemoor School, proving herself to be his mother!

“Whereas I—” Judith sighed aloud to herself; and then she broke into a run after all, to shake off her thoughts.

A gateway wide enough to admit a car let her

into the bungalow grounds. She went along the short gravelled drive and reached the porch, but had no need to announce herself by a ring at the bell. Someone had heard her approaching step and had come round from a side veranda, and a great shock went through Judith as she saw who it was.

“Oh!” she let out amazedly, and then laughed. For the surprise was an entirely pleasant one. “It's—it's Dave Lawder's mother!”

For her part, the new tenant of Cliff Edge bungalow had the friendliest smile of recognition and welcome for Judith.

“And you, my dear—you are the Morcove girl who got me some petrol, last Sunday afternoon, when I had run out of it on my way to Grangemoor!”

“Yes! And little did I dream,” Judith laughed shyly, “why you were making for Grangemoor School! I thought you might be one of the boy's mother; but—”

“But if anybody had told you I was Dave Lawder's mother; if I myself had said it?” smiled the lady. “No, I don't suppose you would have been inclined to believe it. I know people are saying, it's the most unexpected thing they have ever known!”

And yet— It was not for her to say so, but a thing every bit as unexpected had happened to her, Judith, a couple of days ago—

“Please, Mrs. Cardew, I was sent with this note from the headmistress.”

“Thank you. Will you come inside and sit down? The place is rather in a muddle, as furnished houses always seem to be when one takes them over. And I have taken possession in rather a hurry,” the lady remarked, conducting Judith through the veranda's French windpws into a fine sitting-room. “Mr. Gregory, Dave's guardian, told me of the place, and I jumped at it; such an easy run to his school from here, in the car!”

“We heard that Dave was going up to London to be with you, a week before breaking-up day,” said Judith, for Mrs. Cardew was showing no haste about opening the note.

“That's off,” was the smiled reply. “I decided not to be greedy for my son's company, but to let him go on until breaking-up day. He is, it appears, very keen on study.”

“Yes!”

Mrs. Cardew now opened the note and glanced it through, whilst Judith had last Sunday's first impression deepened—that the lady was simply adorable. Dave's mother! Oh, fancy having a mother like this! Above all, fancy finding out, all in an instant, that one had such a mother, after being brought up as an orphan!

“Whilst I”—the inevitable thought followed, in Judith's brain—“I have found out just the very opposite! I thought I had a mother—and I haven't one after all!”

Two days since the disillusionment came upon her—crash! Yet even now her head swam whenever she thought about it all.

“Your headmistress is awfully kind,” exclaimed Mrs. Cardew, as she finished reading. “This is to offer me any help, to make me immediately comfortable—and will I go to dinner one evening at Morcove? Shall I send a note across presently? You are in haste to get back to games, I expect?”

“Oh, no! At least—I'd like to wait!”

“What's your name, my dear, by the way?”

“Judith Grundways.”

“Well, Judith—or do they call you Judy at school? I expect they do! Sit down, Judy, and I won't be a minute.”

The lady, as she said this, drew up a chair to a writing-table. Miss Somerfield's note was intended to lie close at hand whilst the answer was being dashed off; but as Mrs. Cardew reached for stationery she swept the missive off the table by accident, and Judith moved quickly to retrieve it from the carpet.

Very nearly they knocked their heads together, for the lady had as quickly stooped; but to Judith's surprise she did not find Mrs. Cardew smiling when this had happened. There was even no pleasant; "Thank you!" in return for the little act of politeness, and that seemed strange.

Then, increasing Judith's wonderment, she realised that Mrs. Cardew was looking startled—agitated: Surely her hand was shaking as she dipped a pen, and began to write, a few moments later.

"No! I will not write now," was the sudden surprising decision; and the pen clacked back into a crystal ink-tray. "I think I will—send a telegram instead."

"Telegram, Mrs. Cardew—to Miss Somerfield!"

"What? Oh, no, just as if," the lady laughed; but it was a mirthless laugh. "I mean, to somebody up in town. How can I best send off a telegram?"

"From Moreove-road railway-station, Mrs. Cardew; that's much quicker than sending in to Barncombe. Could I send it off for you, on my way back to the school?"

"Would you? Oh, it's good of you!" was the grateful cry. "I've no one I can send My daily woman is in Barncombe for me now. I won't keep you one moment longer—Judy!"

Back at the writing-table, Mrs. Cardew found a telegraph-form and dashed off the brief message in pencil. She was as calm and cordial as it was her nature to be; but undoubtedly she had lost her self-possession for a few moments just now—and why? Judith could not help wondering—why!

"There, Judy Grandways—and here's the shilling for it. Second time you have come to my help!" was the smiling comment. "I must repay you somehow, my dear."

"I'll run all the way—"

"It is kind of you! Good-bye then, and thank you so much!"

Judith would not look at the telegram as she hurried with it to the railway-station, going over the moorland to save every moment. But at the booking-office, where telegrams had to be handed in, the railway clerk wanted to make sure he was going to transmit the address correctly, and he asked Judith to check his reading:

Thus she was bound, after all, to see that it was a message to Mr. Gregory, that lawyer-guardian of Dave's up to a few days ago. And the message was:

"COME AT ONCE."

Awkward for Cora!

"WE wondered!" said Polly Linton.

She was at the threshold of Study 12, having just come in from games. With her was Betty Barton, the Form captain, to whom also the open door was revealing a very reasonable sight. For in the study was Naomer Nakara,



"Oh!" Judith Grandways let out in amazement, and then she smiled. "Why, it's—it's Dave Lawder's mother!"

hovering over an array of Christmas cards that quite covered the table.

"We wondered why you gave us the slip from games!" was the madcap's further cry.

"Yes, bekas, ze time is getting on! No time next week!" was the dusky one's excitable reminder. "So, don't spik, bekas, I am—"

"Wait a bit though; wait a bit!" exclaimed Polly, after a sudden stride to the table. "Are these your cards, Naomer? No, they are not! It's my pocket you've got hold of—"

"No, bekas—"

"My half-crown packet—and yours was only a rubbishy shilling one! Oh, and she's gone and used half a dozen of them!" exploded the madcap. "Ugh!"

"I zink zero must be some mistake, bekas—"

"There is!" Polly agreed grimly. "The old, old mistake of letting you be in this study!"

"Ah, bah, what do eet matter, any old how? Ze cards are all se same—"

"All the same! With those finger-marks."

"It was ze ink—"

"You'll have to pay for all those you have used by mistake," said Polly, with a very meaning emphasis on that last word. "A shilling at least—"

"No, bekas, eef I do, zen I have no money for ze Creamery! What ze diggings," expostulated Naomer, "I am not going to be short of money, breaking-up day!"

"You owe me two shillings," announced Polly solemnly. "For the cards I can't use now. They've gone up, since you helped yourself to them! The counters, in Barncombe, are bare!"

"Not ze bit of eet!"

Polly looked at Naomer hard.

"When I say a thing, Naomer—"

"You never mean it, we know! So—" The rest was a prolonged "Eecccc!" from the imp, as the madcap took her by one ear, with a practised hand, and propelled her into the corridor.

"For I must," said Polly, "be treated with due respect!"

It would probably have been a moment for Naomer to show how much respect she had for the madcap; but Cora Grandways was going by, and Naomer seized it as an opportunity for inquiring:

"Where is Judith, Miss?"

"Why?" snapped Cora.

"Bekas, I want to ask her, while I zink of it; where will she be at Christmas?"

"Why?"

"Bekas I want to send her a card."

"Idiot! Out of my way!"

Then, passing round to her own study, Cora sourly accounted to her intimate friend, Hetty Curzon, for looking so annoyed.

"That stupid Naomer—asking me where Judy will be at Christmas! 'I want to send her a card'—puh! How do I know where Judy will be at Christmas!"

"At home with you, I suppose, Cora?"

"But will she?" returned that girl, scowling.

"How can we tell what is going to happen to Judy—now!"

The door was ajar. Cora took care to turn round and slam it shut, before adding:

"Since you've let out that Judy isn't my sister after all—isn't a Grandways even, but was only adopted—"

"Pity," Hetty sighed. "Pity you told her, Cora."

"Oh, well, I just had to! You had told me, and I wasn't going to spare her; I didn't see why I should! 'Tisn't as though there had ever been any love lost between us!"

Cora flung herself into an armchair and brooded for a minute or so.

"It's a relief," she broke out, at last; but her tone implied an anxiety marring the relief. "You yourself have said, Hetty, that it was going to be made known sooner or later, and so it's just as well the air has been cleared!"

"I said that I felt your parents would have to make it known some day," Hetty conceded, "whether they wished to or not. But they can't be at all pleased with me, I'm afraid, for having let the cat out of the bag. Especially as I wasn't supposed to know!"

"Never mind!" Cora said, jumping up with that reckless air which she could so easily assume. "I'll soon make that all right for you, Hetty! You did it for my sake! Judith was causing me such trouble and pain, at school, to end my misery you let me into the secret. They'll understand!"

"She hasn't told any of the other girls, Cora?"

"No, and is it likely that she will! It's not a thing she would want to talk about—and we don't want to talk about it either," Cora added irritably.

A lengthy pause ensued. Whilst it lasted, both these heartless girls might have become aware of how different from theirs were other thoughts and moods, at present.

Plenty of sounds reached this study, telling of bounding spirits due to the nearness of the "hols:" and Christmas. But Cora was certainly indifferent, gazing out of the window, and Hetty Curzon seemed to be lost in thought.

"Well, Cora, don't say anything more to Judy—"

"Oh, I don't mean to!"

"It has upset her badly, I'm afraid. Miss Everard chose her for that errand to the bungalow, this morning, simply because she looked so washed out, I'm sure. Lying awake at nights, I suppose."

"She brought it all on herself!" Cora shrugged, without looking round. "She shouldn't have gone against me!"

Hetty did not demur to this, although she knew it to be a quite untruthful version of the affair. She had to be very careful what she said to Cora, being dependent to a great extent upon that girl's goodwill.

"There she comes," Cora suddenly remarked, still staring out-of-window. "Nearly dinner-time, and she's only just back! If I took half as long over an errand beyond bounds—the fuss that would be made!"

Next moment Cora was going from the study, and Hetty drifted after her. It was not that they had other girls with whom to mingle chummily. They had no kindred spirits in the Form. Without admitting it to each other, however, the pair did not want to be here if Judith should come up to the study—as she very likely would.

They had found her bearing up in a calm, courageous manner, under the blow. She was not avoiding them, using the study as much as ever for the routine of school life; and so they had begun to avoid her.

The Fourth-Form corridor, as they went along it, held batches of girls standing about in talk, pending the ringing of the dinner-gong. But Hetty and Cora were not wanted to take part in the friendly chatting. They had passed the term in getting themselves more disliked than ever.

But Cora and Hetty were not quite themselves to-day.

At the rise from table they sauntered into the open-air, although usually they hung about in their study upstairs until school began. They seldom took any interest in games, and in any case no games were being played by Form-mates at which the pair could have been derisive on-lookers.

Most of the other girls were mustering in the music-room, there to rehearse for the "breaking-up" concert until the bell should go for afternoon school. An item entitled "Moreove Mirth" was likely to be one of the best in the programme, being composed by madcap Polly and set to music by Madge Minden! Nor must mention be omitted of special scenic effects, the creation of Tess Treawney, the Form's great stand-by for such things.

Tess was going across to the gym, where she always did her scene-painting, when Cora and Hetty started their loiter round.

"All so jolly clever—or they think themselves to be!" was Cora's sneering comment.

"They wanted Judy to go in for it," murmured Hetty. "I wonder if she will, now that she—well, you know!"

"Judy can do as she pleases, I don't care! And for goodness' sake, Hetty, don't keep on about her. It's all through Judy that I'm gated!"

Cora said it—at the same time drifting towards the school's main gateway—as if she were an injured innocent. Once again, however, Hetty preferred not to remind her crony that this was an injustice to Judith. Moodyly, for they would far rather have been upstairs in the study, only Judith was there, they meandered as far as the gateway, and then they found a stranger coming in off the country road.

She was a tall, well-dressed lady—a total stranger to them both.

"I wonder if you will take this note from me, to let the headmistress have it?" she next moment surprised Hetty and Cora by inquiring affably. "I would rather not go up to the schoolhouse with it myself. It can hardly be a convenient time for me to intrude, even for a moment; but I want Miss Somefield to have it without delay."

"Oh, yes, I'll take it," said Cora, with insolent condescension.

"Thank you." And the note changed hands. "I should have sent it by Judy Grandways, before lunch, only— But you seem to be wondering who I am!" smiled the lady. "Mrs. Cardew, staying at Cliff Edge for a bit."

"Oh!" gasped both Morcovians.

"Then your schoolmate, Judy Grandways, didn't say anything about me, when she got back awhile ago? I'm not surprised," Mrs. Cardew remarked, smiling gently. "A quiet, reserved girl, Judy, I imagine. Quite a favourite with you all, no doubt?"

"Er—well—er—"

"Tell me," came a little eagerly, "is Judy Grandways an orphan?"

"Er— orphan!" echoed Hetty and Cora, confusedly.

"I wondered if she might be; I can hardly explain why, except that she's so quiet and serious."

Never in their lives had Cora and Hetty felt so embarrassed.

They certainly were not going to tell Mrs. Cardew the truth about Judith parentage.

"What are your names?" inquired Mrs. Cardew, from friendly interest.

"Er—I'm Hetty Curzon," stammered that girl.

"This is—er—Cora Grandways."

"What, another Grandways?"

"Well—yes," floundered Cora.

"At least—yes, of course I am!"

If Mrs. Cardew had only stared in surprise at such a hesitant answer, neither girl would have thought it remarkable. But the lady had turned very pale, and her expression became one almost of anxiety. It was not until a few moments later that she said:

"I see. I—see! Sisters, are you! Then how stupid of me." And she gave a sharp little laugh. "Well, I mustn't keep you."

Abruptly, though, she turned back to the road beyond the gateway, her step instantly slackened, and the two girls saw how she walked with a bent head—altogether as one in deep thought.

Cora turned to Hetty at last, ending the spell of silence with a peevish exclamation.

"Bother the woman! She made me feel like an idiot, asking me such awkward questions—just those questions!"

"I don't see what it's got to do with her, either," muttered Hetty.

"Oh, Judy has been smarming round her, I suppose!" shrugged Cora.

But it was different an hour

later. Then, in class with the rest of the Form, Cora had a sudden thought about Mrs. Cardew that almost took her breath away—it was so sensational.

In vain she tried to cast the idea out of her mind. It could not be dislodged.

"Get on with your work, Cora," came the admonition from Miss Everard.

Cora went on with her work; but she also went on thinking about Mrs. Cardew—and no wonder. The sudden idea was certainly food for thought!

After school, Hetty had the surprise of finding Cora wanting to talk with Judith. They were no sooner out of class with the rest of the girls than Cora plunged into the midst of a boisterous batch that contained Judith.

"Just a moment, Judy—I want you!"

"I don't know that I can come, Cora," was the answer. "These girls have asked me to—"

"But it's only for a moment!"

Betty and others noticed quite a supplicating note in that cry of Cora's. Something new, for her to implore instead of command! They were aware that Judith, at present, was adopting quite an independent attitude. Evidently, then, it answered!

"I'll come, Cora, but it must be only for a moment!"

"Good old Judy," murmured Polly.

"Come at Once!"

CORA GRANDWAYS, as soon as she was quite alone with Judith, in a ground-floor passage, exclaimed reproachfully:

"You needn't have made such a fuss about giving me a moment!"



"You young scamp, Naomer!" Polly Linton exploded. "That's my packet of Christmas cards you've used!" "I zink zero must be some mistake," was Naomer's answer, and Polly heartily agreed.

"So long as it is to be only a moment, Cora," was the inflexible answer. "But they are going to the music-room again, to rehearse a bit more, before tea—"

"I can't bother about that! The breaking-up concert is nothing to me."

"Well, it is to me; or at any rate, if they want to have me in their—"

"Oh, they can have you! The more you keep out of my way the better—now," Cora said irritably. "Look here, Judy, when you went across to Cliff Edge with that note at mid-day, what did Mrs. Cardew have to say to you?"

"What do you mean?"

"What did she say? What did you talk about? That's what I'm asking you!"

"She only explained how she came to be staying there for the next few days—until Grangemoor breaks up. There was nothing much said, really. She had a note to write, in answer to the one I had brought; but she didn't write it after all. Instead, she suddenly decided to send off a telegram. I took it for her to the station."

"Telegram?" questioned Cora eagerly. "To whom?"

"I don't see what right you have to ask; but I don't suppose it's a secret. It was a telegram to Mr. Gregory, who has been Dave's guardian all these years."

"What to say?"

"Cora, don't be so—"

"Tell me!"

"No," Judith refused quietly. "It's not your business, and I don't allow myself to be nagged or bullied any longer—you know why!"

"So you think you can be uppish about what I told you, last Wednesday, do you? But it may not be anything to glory in after all, my girl!" Cora seethed.

"I only know that at present it seems like—a release," Judith replied. "Freedom—from you."

"All right," the elder girl laughed harshly. "Leave it at that, then! But I want to know more about Mrs. Cardew and—how she behaved to you."

"How she treated me? Why, charmingly, of course! She's sweet. I don't know that I have ever felt more drawn to anyone."

Cora seemed to ponder this remark.

"Huh! Well—she took an interest in you, did she?"

"I felt she liked me. And now I must go," Judith insisted. "These are very likely my last days at Morcove, and I am going to make the most of them!"

She walked away. As for Cora, for at least half a minute she stood as if transfixed. To hear Judith talking like that; to see her acting with such calm, complete independence—it left the elder girl almost frightened.

Not for the first time, Cora's heart missed a beat. There was the feeling that she and Hetty, between them, had tampered with a matter that it would have been far better left alone.

By the time she shook off that feeling of alarm she went up to the studies. Judith had got to the music-room. Cora heard the name of "Judy!" going up amidst all the babel out of which she presumed, a rehearsal would be ultimately obtained.

Meantime, Hetty had reached the study. Cora, entering, sent the door shut violently.

"I say, Hetty— But no, I can't explain," was the tense break-off that caused Hetty's brows to go up. "Look here, though, I want to slip across to Morcove-road railway-station—"

"You're gated, Cora!"

"I know I am! So are you, or you could go for me," raged Cora. "Well, I must manage it somehow."

"But why?"

"Oh—you wouldn't understand—"

"But you might explain, Cora! I always tell you everything."

"Yes, and there's such a thing, perhaps, as telling what you shouldn't!"

"Oh, if you are going to start blaming me for—"

"No, Hetty—"

"After all, you worried my life out to know what it was that I knew about—about Judy."

"Very well; if I did, I did! But—you can't know what's in my mind; can't be told at present, anyhow, Hetty. Look here, I'm going across to the station, and chance it!"

"Go on then," laughed Hetty. "I'm not wanting to stop you. Shall I come with you?"

"No! I think I stand a chance, don't you?" Cora said excitedly. "There's another silly old rehearsal going on; then it'll be tea-time. Tell you what, Hetty; you can help me when I get back from the station. You be about in the grounds—you know which side—and look out for me. If I hear you whistling or humming, I shall know it's all right. If you cough, I'll know there's danger."

"Right-ho!" smiled Hetty. "And will you want a hand with a parcel or something—or is it a hamper?"

"Oh, shut up!"

With which snappish check upon the other's flippancy, Cora quitted the study.

Ten minutes later, a girl wearing neither hat nor coat crawled on hands and knees through a narrow gap in Morcove's boundary hedge.

The slight breach, due to one of the bushes being damaged by a falling three-branch, had been stopped with wire netting. But Cora had dragged the netting clear, close to the ground, and now she was wriggling through, with all the dexterity of an old hand at the game!

Beyond lay undulating, green-covered ground—part of the vast moorland's fringe. Days were at their very shortest now, and already the light was waning. A bluish mistiness dulled the landscape, and she knew that after a stooping rush for the first hundred yards or so she would be able to go on far less warily.

There might even be a rapid thickening of the wintry mist in the next half-hour. The wind was down, and whilst she scurried along she heard ships sounding their sirens, far out at sea. All the better—so she thought! All the better for the getting back!

Rabbits bolted before her as she careered along, taking advantage of any low-lying ground to run her very fastest.

Once or twice, whilst having to go over rising ground, she had the Barncombe road in sight, and there were girls cycling along it, but she had nothing to fear from them. Her surroundings abounded in gorse and stunted bushes, affording ample cover. As for the by-road leading to the station, that was deserted.

So at last she emerged upon that by-road and walked boldly towards the tiny wayside station, where signal lamps already glimmered in the murky half-light. That she was going to present a rather surprising appearance to the young man in charge of the booking-office did not give Cora much concern. The very questions she was

going to put to him would account for her hatless state.

He was just coming away from the little office, to get his tea during one of the many lifeless intervals between trains, when Cora stepped up to him.

"Er—that telegram you had to send off to-day," she began; and the ticket-collector paused in the act of locking his office-door, to gape at her.

"Why, what about it, miss?"

"The lady at the bungalow wants to know that it went off all right? She trusted it to—one of the girls at my school, you know."

"It went off, miss, the moment it was handed to me, you can tell the lady. At twelve-forty-one."

"And you're sure you got the address right?"

"Sure, miss! 'Mr. Gregory, Fountain Court, Temple, London—Come at once—Cardew.' I wasn't going to have any mistake, miss. The young lady checked it with me!"

"Oh, then—that's all right. Thanks—good-evening."

And Cora turned away, her smile becoming an exultant one. So much for Judith's refusal to say what the message was! "I knew I could get it from that fellow."

"Come at once."

Burden of half the telegrams that were ever sent! "Something unexpected has happened—urgent reason for seeing you—come at once!" So Cora's quick brain amplified the message. And was the urgency merely in connection with Dave? It hardly seemed possible. What on earth had he to do with it? For it was simply when Judy had arrived at the bungalow with a note from Miss Somerfield that Mrs. Cardew had suddenly decided to send off a telegram. Those were Judith's own words.

Well, could the headmistress of Morcove have been writing about Dave? Even if the note had mentioned that boy, could it have been anything serious enough to warrant fetching Mr. Gregory all the way from London—at once!

But Mr. Gregory was a lawyer, and most likely Mrs. Cardew would turn to him for advice about matters altogether apart from those connected with her son. "Come at once"—as if it were not a bit of use Mrs. Cardew's going off to London, at once, to see the lawyer there! Yet she must realise that his time was worth far more than her own.

"I'd like to know—just why it was!" Cora said to herself, as she set off back to Morcove. "I can't get over her being so interested in Judy. The way she came over quite queer almost, when we let her think Judy was my sister. Until that moment, she seemed to be—Hallo, though, I must hurry!"

For, although she had wanted to find the mist thickening, she had not wished for such a dense white fog as was now rolling in from off the sea.

She knew only too well how impenetrable they could be—these sudden, blanket-like fogs to which the district was so susceptible.

From the windows of Morcove you could sometimes see such a fog creeping in over a calm, cold sea; then it would climb the cliffs and spread all across the countryside, and they were lucky folk who were able to get indoors in time!

Suddenly the white, dense, drizzling mist was all around Cora. She at once turned back, to find the station's by-road again, and then go down it to the main road. Less than a mile though it was, across the fringe of the moor from the station to the school, she felt afraid to try for that direct line.

Yes, she knew these fogs! You so easily, so quickly, lost all sense of direction, when one gorse-bush was just the same as another; and then you found yourself going round and round—

Five minutes later she was palpitating with alarm, for she had not got back to the station-road and so it seemed as if she was indeed simply going round and round!

"Oh, dash the fog," she raged. "Where have I got to now? Which way is the wretched school!"

Darkness was coming on all the quicker after the fog. She went on again, feeling that that must be the right course, for at least there had been a helpful sound, just then—the droning note of a ship's siren, from far out at sea. By keeping the sea upon her left, she must come out all right.

But the next time she heard the sound, it seemed to be the distant blare of a motor-horn. Which was it—ship's siren, or the long note sent out by some fogbound motorist, feeling his way across the moor? If the latter, then the sea was upon her right; she was going away from the school—yet not coming to the road, not finding any cart-track even—

"Oh, bother, it is only a car!" she fumed, a minute later. "Where on earth am I getting to, then? That can't be the Barcombe road where the car is; it sounds much too far off."

Then she heard the ding-dong of Morcove's chimes, and they told her she was going completely in the wrong direction!

Even then, the maddening helplessness was not at an end. She had become almost frantic when at last the whistle of an engine began a whole series of sounds guiding her back to the station. Fog or no fog, there was some shunting to be done there. The banging about of a few trucks continued just long enough to prove of vital help to Cora.

In a panting, half-terrified state, she flourished out on to the lonely by-road, and without a moment's pause for breath she ran for the main road.

It was almost dark night by now—and she, without hat or coat, scuttling back as fast as possible to a schoolhouse from which she had no right to be absent.

Considering Cora's customary recklessness, she might have been expected to treat her present plight as a bit of a joke. But she didn't. She was wishing to goodness she had never sneaked away upon that secret journey to the station.

And yet—she had found out the import of that telegram. And might it not mean—No, she must not—dare not—allow that thought to cross her mind again!

"What an idiot I am, to start having such a crazy idea. There can't possibly be anything in it! And now, hang, I'm in the ditch!"

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"Let Me In!"

THE pleasantest buzz of conversation was going on at a long tea-table in Morcove's great dining-hall.

The Fourth Form, having rehearsed its bit of "Morcove Mirth," had kept together for tea down here, instead of dispersing for the customary study teas.

Probably it had been Miss Everard's happy belief, before she went from the tea-table a minute since, but in any case it was Betty's thought at this moment; the Fourth Form had never been more united!

"More tea, anybody?" cried Betty, to whom Miss Everard had deputed pouring-out duties.

"Yes!" chorused rosy-cheeked juniors who had developed rare thirsts during the recent try-out in the music-room. "Please, Betty! Half a cup! A full one for me, Betty! And don't forget ze sugar—three lumps!"

"Pass 'em up," said Betty gaily. Then the chatter was continued. About their part in the breaking-up concert—anyhow, they had got the Fifth Form whacked! "Yes, wather, bai Jove!" It ought to go with a bang! Should do, when Polly had made it the best thing she had ever composed! "A weal scweam, geals, through-out!" And then about the holidays—Christmas!

"Only to think," exclaimed Helen Craig. "This time next week, and where shall we all be!"

"Well, it's been a wonderful term," came from Polly.

"Gorjus! And don't forget, when we come back, next term—"

Uproar at the tea-table, the Form most strenuously opposing any allusion to next term! Then a sudden mention of prizes, resulting in jocular predictions as to who had got them. A remark from Tess: did they notice what a nasty fog had come up? Never mind fogs this evening—so long as there was snow at Christmas! But talking of prizes—

And so on, all tongues going at once, cups hanging down as their owners were seized with fits of laughter, and Betty having to semaphore to Judith as a final resource, it being impossible to inquire without yelling:

"Your cup, Judy?"

Judith, six seats away from the captain, answered with a smiling shake of the head. "No more, thanks." But Judith was feeling that she could do with any amount more of this chummy gaiety. Now and then some lightsome remark gave her a pang. "This time next week!" for instance. But how glad it made her to see them all so carefree so friendly, and excited.

"And now, I suppose, we had better do some work!"

When Betty said that, everybody being finished, there were mingled cheers and groans. Judith let her Form-mates go dashing away before she herself went up to the studies.

By the time she reached the Fourth Form corridor an orderly silence was prevailing. She could imagine so well what it would be like in most of these studies, during the next hour or two. A zealous tackling of "prep," then perhaps some letter-writing. Girls were hearing pretty frequently from home, these days, and so they had much to write back, about the holidays, and Christmas, and what to give for presents.

Poor Judy! No wonder if she had to take a big grip on herself, on her way to the study round the corner. For her to think of other girls, in all their happiness, was to realise with ever-increasing

acuteness, amounting to a kind of horror, how uncertain her own future had become. A few more days, and then—what would those at home be doing about her?

"When they find out that I have been told!" she said to herself. "As, of course, they'll have to find out. What a pity they ever brought me up as their own child, if I was only to be told at last that I am not their daughter—"

She entered the study. Only Hetty was there, and this surprised Judith, the more so as Hetty seemed to be in a fidgety state—unable to settle to anything.

That girl had set out her books for prep, but had not yet done a stroke. There were, however, as Judith noticed, no books of Cora's on the other side of the table.

Not a word passed between Hetty and Judith. It was on the tip of Judith's tongue to ask; where was Cora then? But she forebore, collected such books as she wanted, and went away with them, to work elsewhere. After all, why trouble about Cora now? Why feel the old sisterly anxiety lest she should be doing something in defiance of discipline? She was not her sister any longer.

Downstairs went Judith again—of all Morcove's girls, the only one who would be working in a class-room this evening. She was soon at her own desk in the Fourth Form class-room, with an hour's work in front of her, to be done—all alone.

It had been this place or the library, and she knew that the library might not be as deserted as usual, to-night. The class-room's radiators were keeping up a nice warmth, and the windows had been closed, to keep out the wet, white fog that had suddenly come in from the sea.

For a few minutes she concentrated upon her evening task, the only sounds in the great room those that she herself made by turning the pages of a primer, or banging down a ruler.

Suddenly, however, she glanced up sharply, her pen resting in the middle of a word.

What was that sound she had heard just then—from outside?

After sitting very still for a long moment, looking towards the great windows of the class-room, she left her desk to go across to them.

At the same instant one of the windows lost its dull blankness. A face came close to a bottom pane, catching the strong light that was in the class-room; and it was a face that Judith might well recognise instantly. Cora!

Bareheaded, her hair damp and streaky from the fog, her eyes wild-looking—there she was, out in the raw wintry night. Locked out, as she now knew herself to be, on her return from some escapade!

"Let me in! Quick, Judy—let me in!" her eyes were imploring.

A moment, this, for Judith to experience all the old habitual dread of disgrace for a wayward sister! She remembered that the class-room door was ajar, and she darted over to it as being the first thing to do—close it softly.

Then, as she had never done before, when it was Cora who had to be shielded, saved—she paused. It was as if all the years of unwavering devotion, of loyalty that had never once won a "Thank you," were being recalled by Judith in this single instant, making her ask herself: "Why should I? After all—why should I, now?"

No longer her sister! But still the same Cora, ready to nag and bully again, no doubt, as soon as the danger had passed! Why, then, move a finger to aid her? Wasn't it time she found some-

one else? Hadn't she Hetty Curzon to rely upon?

But such thoughts as these were gone as quickly as they had come. Judith flew across from the closed door to the window against which Cora's imploring face was pressed. Climbing to the sill, she slipped back the catch, jumped down again, and then raised the lower sash.

There was danger of its squeaking, and Cora's hissed warning came instantly, whilst she herself was helping.

"Careful! If you make a sound, Judy——"

Judy did not answer when she had raised the sash noiselessly, high enough for Cora to clamber in over the sill.

"Filthy night," muttered the girl, as she came foot-to-floor in the classroom.

Judith, by returning to her desk, was indicating that she did not wish to hold any conversation.

"Well, shut that window!" muttered Cora, going on to the door at once.

Her thanks to Judith, for having come to the rescue! With only that snappish command, Cora hastened away—saved, and so she could give a sudden little laugh.

"Huh, rather funny!"

But she had done with looking amused when, a few minutes later, she marched in upon Hetty Curzon, upstairs.

"You're a nice one, Hetty!"

"But, Cora, how could I——"

"Oh, don't talk to me!" snarled Cora. "So you've been calmly going on with your work, have you, although you knew I was locked out!"

"I—I did my best, Cora, really! How could I hang about in the grounds when darkness had come on—and that fog?"

"You might have hung about downstairs——"

"And been noticed! As a matter of fact, I did the far better thing—went up to leave the pushbar doors to the fire-escape open. You didn't think to go up the outside stairs? I wonder you didn't! Really, Cora, it's not like me to let you down if I can help it. You ought to know!"

"All I know is I've had a rotten time. I was properly lost for a bit, in the beastly fog."

"I can't think why you wanted to sneak out like that!"

"No, well, you can't always be told what's in my mind."

Hetty tried an appeasing remark.

"Did you get what you wanted, anyhow?"

"Eh? Oh, I don't know! Yes, I did, in a way! I suppose, Hetty," added Cora, after a pause, "you haven't heard any talk in the school about—well, about a hitch in connection with that business of Dave and his mother? There isn't any doubt about their relationship, or anything?"

"Goodness, no! Why ever should you——"

"Oh, well, only because Mrs. Cardew telegraphed to the man who was Dave's guardian, to come at once. But it could hardly be about that, could it?"

"Sure not! Oh, no," Hetty said, convinced. "You seem very interested in Mrs. Cardew all at once, Cora! Why?"

"Shan't say—at present, anyhow."

Hetty allowed the talk to lapse there. She was burning with curiosity. At the same time, she could tell that Cora was longing to confide something, so it seemed the best policy to wait.

After resting awhile, and making up for a missed tea by dipping into a box of chocolates, Cora started prep. By then, Hetty had finished hers and was free to loll back in an easy-chair, book on lap—giving her eyes more often to her study-mate than to the printed page. Clearly, Cora had something upon her mind that was very exciting. What on earth could it be?

The evening ended without Hetty's being told. But it appeared that Cora, if she did not feel inclined to confide in her crony, could at least make use of her. When they were going down to prayers, knowing themselves to be even then a bit late for the muster, Cora surprised Hetty by saying, softly:

"Now, Hetty, I want you to stay on the look-out in the corridor—close to Study 12—whilst I go in there for a jiffy. Give me warning if anybody is coming."

"But, Cora—why?"

"Never mind why; you do that for me, Hetty!"

A minute later Cora was in Study 12, searching first along two or three shelves of books. Not finding what she wanted, she turned to the table, on the side where Polly sat.



"But you've opened my letter!" was Judith's indignant cry. "Well, I've often opened them before!" Cora Grandways responded. "You know very well you have no right to—NOW!" was Judith's heated retort.

Cora pulled open the drawer that was reserved for Polly's use, and there, along with the most extraordinary collection of odds and ends, was a snapshot album.

This was what Cora had wanted! She had it upon the table instantly, and her fingers thrust over the pages.

Suddenly Cora came upon a snap of Jack Linton and his chum Dave Lawder. It was a head and shoulders photograph, printed from a good negative. Cora looked at it closely for a good while, holding it near the electric-light.

"Aren't you coming, Cora?" came Hetty's whisper round the edge of the opening door. "We shall be awfully late!"

The girl who had been keeping watch tip-toed into the study, overcome by curiosity.

"What are you looking at those for, Cora?"

"Never your mind!"

And Cora, closing the album, put it back into the drawer, but without having replaced that one snap which had engaged her close attention.

A Broken Silence!

SATURDAY morning—and the last Saturday in the term!

Morcove didn't mind that the fog of over-night looked like hanging about all day. Plenty of ways of spending this afternoon's halfer without recourse to the games-field!

Fog need be no hindrance to a run into Barncombe, where shops were very gay. And there were Christmas cards to be sorted and messages to be written in time for early posting. There were extra-boisterous gatherings to hold, in this study and that. There were rehearsals! And if all or any of these diversions did not make the last halfer of the term fly fast enough—one could always start packing.

"But I'm not so sure after all that the fog won't lift," cried Polly, after breakfast.

She had given the barometer a pretty good tapping as she went by it, going now with the rest of the Form to see what the postman had brought.

"Yes, queek, come on, Paula!"

"Wowp! Why must you, Naomer, be so——"

"Bekas," and Naomer chanted, as she pranced along:

"Christmas is coming,
Ze geese are getting fat,
So——

Please put a penny in ze blind man's hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Compliments of ze season, everybody!" yelled Naomer, dashing amongst the throng of girls. "And now, queek, Meess Everard, how many for me?"

Miss Everard would not have been likely to answer, even if she had heard the cry. It was a very heavy postbag, this morning, and the whole school was particularly clamorous. Also, it was taking very little to amuse the juniors, so that when one shouted: "Here!" much louder than the girl before, and then another shouted "Here!" even louder still, there were shrieks of laughter.

"Betty Barton——"

"Here!"

But the Form captain, although she had shouted at the top of her voice, was to be outdone by madcap Polly. What made the madcap's shout sound like one fit to bring the ceiling down was that it came after a quiet response from staid Madge Minden. Also, there had been more time for Polly to save her breath in readiness.

"Polly Linton——"

"Hee-err!"

Again shrieks of laughter went up.

"Grandways——"

"That's me!" said Cora, to be different from all the rest, which difference she certainly emphasized by a rude snatching at the letter that was passed across to her.

And, after all, it was not she who should have claimed the letter. Miss Everard, as she often did, had only called the surname. On the envelope there was a written: "Miss Judy Grandways."

Observing this, Cora scowled, began to look about for Judith, and then changed her mind and hurried away, taking the letter with her.

The last few mornings, Judith had not attended the giving-out of letters in the front hall. Never again was she going to wait about in the hope that there would be a letter from home—for her. Not once this term had that hope been fulfilled, and she knew why, now.

Cora did not look at the unopened letter again until she had reached her study. Judith was not there; as for Hetty, she was still downstairs waiting in case there should be something for her. Alone in the study, Cora examined the envelope's postmark and was surprised to find that it was no other than—Barncombe!

"I knew it wasn't mother's writing, anyhow," she muttered. "But who is writing to Judy from Barncombe? I'm going to open this! I don't see why I shouldn't!"

A finger ripped at the envelope, and next moment the address at the head of the notepaper seemed to leap to meet her eyes. It was in large, black, embossed type:

Cliff Edge, Bungalow,
Morcove,
North-Devon.

From Mrs. Cardew!

Cora was agasp with excitement as she took the letter to the window, for a better light.

"Dear Judy,—My son is coming over from Grangemoor to-morrow (Saturday) to spend the week-end with me, and he may be bringing his chum, Jack Linton.

"I wonder if you and your sister would care to come to tea in the afternoon, and if you can get Jack's sister to come as well, and one or two more, so much the better! I understand you and the boys have always been good friends.

"By the same post I am writing to Miss Somerfield, and I am sure there'll be no difficulty about getting permission.

"I'll expect you about nine o'clock."

Cora, having read the letter twice over, held it edgewise to her lips, whistling against the edge. Her excitement had not abated. She looked ready to start muttering to herself.

Then Hetty came in.

"Oh, you heard from home, Cora?"

"No. And shut that door," was the terse request. "Hetty—what do you think of this? Read it!"

"But this," Hetty glanced up to say, a moment later, "is to Judy!"

"Read it!"

Hetty had no sooner done so than the letter was being snatched back.

"I opened it, yes. I'm afraid I'm so used to every Grandways lettering being for me, I didn't look at the envelope! So there it is, Hetty; Mrs. Cardew invites me and others, along with Judy; but she writes to Judy. It's Judy she wants—and I think I know why!"

Hetty smiled.

"Do you? But I mustn't be inquisitive, must I?"

"Oh, I know what you mean," Cora responded testily. "Because I wouldn't confide in you yesterday. But now, Hetty—what with this letter, and one thing and another—I feel I'd like your opinion. Why is Mrs. Cardew so greatly interested in Judy?"

"I am sure I can't imagine! But is she?"

"Why did she telegraph to that lawyer-chap to come down at once?—so that he'll be at the bungalow, this afternoon, most likely, when we are there," Cora spoke on, in a low, tense voice. "Why does Mrs. Cardew want the lawyer to have a chance of seeing Judy—studying her—?"

"But, Cora, does Mrs. Cardew—"

"Yes, she does, I am sure! It's the reason for this invitation! And do you know what I think it all means? You would never guess," whispered Cora; "but I can tell you. First of all, though—look at this."

She pulled open a table-drawer and brought out an unmounted photograph—a holiday snap of two schoolboys.

"Jack Linton and Dave Lawder!" Hetty named them, as she looked.

"Never mind Jack Linton; but take a good look at Dave," Cora urged softly. "Notice anything? No, you don't! All right; but I can see something that all helps!"

"Cora, what on earth do you mean?"

"Simply this," Hetty's bewildered cry was answered, in a guarded tone; "there's a likeness between Dave Lawder and somebody I know; somebody whom you know, too, Hetty—at this school—"

"At Morcove? A girl, then?"

"Yes—"

"But—oh, you don't mean—"

"Sh!" Cora was returning the photograph to her table-drawer. "That's exactly what I do mean, Hetty," she whispered across. "We know that Judy is no more my sister than you are. So her parentage, of course, has been a mystery all these years. Just the same, in fact, as Dave's had been, up to a week ago! And the fact of the matter is, Hetty, they've both got the same mother!"

"What?"

"I tell you, there must be something about Judy that Mrs. Cardew noticed," Cora spoke on excitedly. "That is why Mrs. Cardew telegraphed to the lawyer. Remember yesterday how she seemed to take it for granted that Judy was an orphan—"

"And seemed unable to believe it, when we said that Judy was your sister," Hetty rejoined quickly.

"As we had to let her think, of course! My goodness, Cora, but what a—how strange and thrilling if—if Dave and Judy are brother and sister! And you say you can now see a likeness—"

"Sh!"

There was a footfall outside the study. The door opened, letting in Judith. She began at once:

"I'm told there was a letter for me, Cora—"

"Oh—er—yes," blurted out the elder girl. "Here it is—"

"But you've opened it!" was Judith's indignant cry, as the letter was passed across. "How dared you, Cora!"

"Well, I've often opened letters of yours, haven't I? As the elder—"

"That doesn't matter!" Judith protested hotly. "You know very well that you've no right now!"

"Oh, well, I didn't notice the Christian name, anyhow, and there's no harm done," blustered

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Cora. "It's from Mrs. Cardew, inviting you and me to tea this afternoon. We shall go, of course."

Judith needed only a few moments to glance through the brief note; then she spoke once more.

"We shall not go, Cora—is it likely! I'll let her know in good time—"

"You'll do nothing of the sort!" flared out Cora, coming at Judith with a stamping step. "It so happens that I wish to go!"

"Your wishes," was the quiet retort, "are nothing to me now, Cora. You're no longer my sister, for me to have to give in to you. No, I've finished with all that—free. And the sooner we all get home, so that the whole thing can be gone into, the better I shall like it. I may not be able to call it home any more; but—"

"You had better shut up!" panted Cora. "Even though you are not my sister— Look here, Judy, let's—"

"What, you don't think I'd care to have you for a friend?"

There was deep scorn in the words. In the past, Cora would have flown at Judith for saying anything only a tenth as scornful; but now the elder girl stood abashed. She had no more to say than had Hetty, and in sudden silence Judith went out of the study, taking the letter with her.

Five seconds later she was at the threshold of Study 12.

"Polly—"

"Hallo, Judy!" cried the madcap. "Come right in!"

"Yes, bekas—"

"One moment, whilst I deal with Naomer," requested Polly. Taking hold of the imp, she shot her into the lap of seated Paula, who let out a terrific howl.

"Yes, Judy?" Polly then inquired.

"It's too absurd," said Judith, with a smile that masked her distress. "Mrs. Cardew has invited Cora and me to tea at the bungalow, as if we were chums of Jack and Dave! The boys will be there, this afternoon—"

"At Cliff Edge? Oh—"

"Hooray, gorjus! Bekas—"

Naomer got no further. Although Polly had been handed a letter to read, that did not prevent her from standing armed with a ruler!

She looked up from the note, in a few moments, to find Judith still smiling.

"Mrs. Cardew doesn't quite understand, does she, Polly? She should be asking all your girls to Study 12. She would have written, I expect, if she'd known. But I can easily make it all right. I'll slip across, after morning school."

"But, Judy! Jack and Dave look on you as a chum—you know they do! Surely you want to go—"

"Not with Cora," said Judith; and Polly thought what a remarkable thing that was for Judy to say.

There was no time for more. The Form had to go into class now, and it would do so with the joyful knowledge that it was the last morning for serious work. Next week all routine would go by the board—hooray!

And the fog was going to clear after all, girls noticed at break. Old Sol, with what strength the wintry season had allowed him to retain, was doing his best. At mid-day, when Judith set off in haste to Cliff Edge bungalow, the mist was all dissolving, giving her sunshiny surroundings agan.

So might the fog of mystery that now enveloped her young life, clear off at last, came the sudden hopeful thought, leaving her free to tread brighter paths than she had ever known before!

No Such Luck!

"WHY, Judy, what brings you here! Not to say that you can't come to tea this afternoon, I hope?"

"It was awfully sweet of you to send that invitation, Mrs. Cardew. Only—it shouldn't have been for me!"

"Well, you must allow me my own opinion about that, Judy?" returned the lady, smiling very charmingly.

Judith laughed.

"You can give Dave and Jack a far better treat than that, Mrs. Cardew! Their real chums are in Study 12. Polly Linton, who is Jack's sister, and

"But I said in my note, bring any others whom you think the boys would like to meet! I meant Polly, of course, and the Form captain; but you must come, too, Judy. I've heard Dave speak about you. And you have a sister, haven't you?"

At these words Judith found it hard not to let her face reveal her painful thoughts. How could she explain that Cora was a girl who had always made herself so objectionable, Dave and Jack disliked her! It would seem like running down one's own sister—for Mrs. Cardew knew no better than Morcove and the rest of the world, how that relationship had turned out to be a pure fiction.

"Your sister would like to come, Judy?"

"I think Cora had better not, please,"

was the evasive plea. "I—I hate to say it, but Cora has never—hit it off with Polly and the rest. And the boys know. It sounds like—you know; but—"

"I am sure you only say it because you must, my dear," Mrs. Cardew broke in comfortingly. "And you are ready to deny yourself the pleasure, not liking to come without your sister. As she is your sister, I think—I understand."

"Then you will know that I am—acting for the best, Mrs. Cardew? You'll not see me and Cora; but Polly and some of her chums will be here at the time you said."

"You must come as well, Judy; I insist," was said with an affectionate firmness that gave the girl strange emotions. "Dave and Jack would like you to be there, I know!"

After a pause, Mrs. Cardew added:

"And I myself feel very interested in you, Judy.

It would never do for me to explain; but—since this time yesterday, when you came with that note from your headmistress—I had a sudden fancy that you were—an orphan! There was something about you that struck me that way!"

Judith looked down to the ground, not wanting the sudden moisture in her eyes to be noticed. If this sweet and gentle lady did but know, she had only inferred what was the truth!

"Then, I discovered that you had a sister at Morcove," Mrs. Cardew resumed softly, "and altogether I—I realised that my ideas about you had been—well, foolish. You should be happy. Your parents alive; a sister with you at school! And yet— Look up, Judy; what is it then, dear— Oh, are you crying?"

"No, Mrs. Cardew. Oh—please—"



Judith entered rather shyly with Dave Lawder—

"But tell me." There was a touch upon Judith's shoulders as kindly as any she had ever known. You mustn't be so unhappy! Aren't they, then, kind to you—at home?"

Judith sobbed aloud—she had to. Mrs. Cardew had taken her by the hand and was drawing her close, patting the hand she held caressingly.

"You shouldn't be feeling like this, my dear."

"I know—oh, I know I shouldn't," Judith said lumpily. "But there it is—as you said; I'm different from other girls!"

"As my son Dave has become different from other boys," was Mrs. Cardew's murmured rejoinder. "And I can so easily understand. I might be able to do so much for you, if—the cause were the same in your case. I have found my own son at last, whom I had not set eyes upon since he was a little tot. But I have not found —"

She checked herself sharply, darting Judith an uneasy glance, as if even that broken utterance had been an indiscretion.

"Anyhow, be sure and come with the others, by-and-bye." Dave's mother resumed, with enforced lightness. "You have twice rendered me a useful service, remember. Thanks to you, Mr. Gregory got that telegram in good time, yesterday. I had a letter from him, this morning, saying that he is coming down. And now, I do believe," turning towards the road, at the sound of a car, "he is here now—yes!"

The hired motor from Barncombe was slowing, to turn in at the bungalow gateway. Judith would gladly have seized the opportunity to be off, but Mrs. Cardew said with insistence:

"No, wait, Judy! It's just what I wanted!"



—"Hooray, he's brought her!" Naomer yelled, and Mrs. Cardew smiled happily at the sight of her son with Judy.

Mr. Gregory alighted from the car half way up the short drive, for Dave's mother had stepped to meet the lawyer there. From a little distance away, Judith saw how they greeted each other, and noticed how earnestly they at once talked—in subdued voices. She was not surprised, knowing that the lawyer had been urged to come at once; but she felt puzzled when he glanced at her again and again whilst talking so softly with Mrs. Cardew.

Then, suddenly, they both came across to Judith.

"This is the girl, Mr. Gregory."

"How are you, my dear?" Mr. Gregory smiled down upon her, after taking her by the hand. "And so your name is Judy! The sort of nice, old-fashioned nick-name that I like. I have met several of you Morcove girls. I remember a Polly Linton—"

"Yes, sir," Judith said, laughing again to disguise her feelings. "You couldn't forget Polly Linton."

"But you, my dear—no, I have never seen you before. How old are you, Judy?"

She told him, and although he had seemed to put the question with friendliness, she noticed that the answer caused him to glance at Mrs. Cardew. And how pale Mrs. Cardew had become!

"A well grown girl!" the lawyer commented. "But you're not looking as well as you should, Judy!" He was still retaining her hand and seemed to have noticed the thinness of the wrist. "Hallo, when did you get this?"

It struck Judith that he seemed more a doctor than a lawyer. An old scar just above the wrist was what he was looking at.

"Oh, that, sir! I've always had that," Judith answered lightly. "Ever since I can remember! I suppose I—I met with an accident, when I was quite a child."

"Never been told how you came by the scar?"

"No, sir. They've never seemed to know—at home."

"Why, have you asked them, then—and they haven't been able to explain?"

"I can remember speaking about it once; but—no," Judith faltered, "I didn't get any explanation."

Mr. Gregory let her hand go then, but he seemed still to study her all the while.

"Well!" Mrs. Cardew suddenly laughed. "Now you can run along back to school, Judy! But mind—four o'clock—this afternoon! Earlier, if games will allow. Mr. Gregory will be here. He is down for the week-end."

"And I shall want to see Polly!" he remarked bluffly. "I must see Polly!"

"You'll see her, sir," was Judith's parting response. "Nothing will keep Polly away from her brother!"

"Bring them all," was Mrs. Cardew's injunction. "Mr. Gregory has two nights to spend at a cheerless hotel in Barncombe, so we must make it up to him in other ways!"

For a moment Judith was smiling behind her, on her way to the gate; then she was eyes to the front and the smile was fading—giving place, instantly, to that look which seemed to belong to Judith these days.

Vividly she could imagine what a jolly gathering it would be at the bungalow, this afternoon. Polly and others, the two boys—and Mrs. Cardew! But she, Judith, would not be there—no. No! She was not going to have the whole thing spoiled, as it would be, if she turned up—with Cora.

"How I wish I could have said; how I wish I could tell all Morcove—Cora is no longer my sister!" ran Judith's mind during the run back to school. "But it wouldn't be right. Cora and Hetty told me, without permission from home, so it mustn't go any further at present."

But if—if only she could have told Mrs. Cardew! Just her, and her only, asking her to keep it secret! So that she could have yielded, then, to the longing to cast herself into arms that would be loving, comforting ones, and could have heard that gentle voice saying: "Never mind, Judy dear; never mind now! Think of me as being—the mother you have never known—"

Fortunate, Dave, to have found such a mother at last!

"I don't begrudge him his luck, though, goodness knows," Judith said to herself, hastening on almost in tears. "But if only she were my mother, too!"

Which would make Dave, of course, her brother—just fancy!

Oh, but how silly it was, to have such thoughts! Away with such tantalising fancies. After having Cora for a sister all these years, to find that she had, instead, a brother in Dave!

A good many girls were on the games-field, now that the sun had sent the last wisps of fog drifting away over the moorlands. Judith ran across to speak with Polly and others.

"Mrs. Cardew says, half-past three if games will allow," was Judith's smiling remark. "And won't it be a lovely afternoon for you, after all?"

"Gorjus! Bekas—"

"But, Judy!" cried Polly. "Hi! You're coming with us?"

Judith, however, walked away, preserving a very significant silence about her intentions.

"It's that Cora," grimaced Polly.

"Ugh, if I had a sister like Cora—"

"Yes, well," said Pam serenely. "Be thankful that you have a brother instead—like Jack!"

"How I wish Judy had a brother," sighed the madcap. "I know brothers can be an awful bore at times. Still, that's what Judy wants—poor Judy! A brother, say, like Dave!"

"No such luck," was Madge Minden's rejoinder. "Not for Judy!"

So Like a Brother!

IT afforded Cora Grandways the old malicious delight to turn up at the threshold of Study 12, round about three o'clock, dressed for going out.

"Well, I'm ready, if you girls are!" she said.

Polly gnashed her teeth—and not simply because she was fastening a glove.

"Judy isn't coming," supplemented Cora.

"We are quite aware of that," said Betty coldly. "But you mean to go—although you were only invited to go with Judy?"

"After all, weren't you?" Cora retorted insolently.

"No, we were not," flashed Polly. "I was asked to go in any case, being Jack's sister, and Mrs. Cardew wants any other girls with whom the boys are friendly!"

"End of term," laughed Cora. "Christmas, and all that! Anyhow, I don't keep away, just to suit Judy's pleasure or yours! I mean to go, if only to—"

"If only to make yourself a nuisance, of course," Polly caught up the obnoxious girl. "Oh, all right, come! Let's get away, girls—"

"Yes, bekas, zey may be glad to start tea!"

"I'll catch you up, on the drive," remarked Betty, suddenly sitting; and less than a minute later she was taking a peep into the library, downstairs. Judith was there, seeking a book. Betty hastened across to her.

"Now, Judy, whilst there's still time—won't you change your mind?"

"Oh, no, Betty; I—I—"

"But Cora is going, in any case!"

"I know she is," Judith responded. "I have tried my hardest, Betty."

"Oh, but Judy, do get your things on, and—"

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"No, Betty, and please leave me," was the entreaty. "I hope you have a nice time. But I'm sure you will, even though—"

Her voice trailed off into silence, and she reached a hand to a book that might beguile her, and her entire air was one of such resoluteness, Betty gave up the attempt and went away.

Then Judith found an easy-chair for herself, and opened the book; but she soon let it fall neglected to her lap.

She was the only girl in the fine library, and it was not likely that she would be disturbed. Morcove had no use for a library on a fine halfer, and that the last halfer before the Christmas hols.!

Either the girls were out at the games field, or had gone into Barncombe to do some Christmas shopping, or were in their studies, preparing for the hols. Judith could not go to her study, for she fancied that Hetty was there.

It did seem a little hard, she was thinking. Cora was no longer her sister, and yet Cora still exercised this influence.

"But it will end in a little while now," Judith comforted herself. "There will have to be a change as soon as they know at home that I know! There's bound to be a change then—"

Suddenly she closed the book, laid it aside, and drifted out of the library. By now, Betty and the rest must have got to the bungalow, and so she could take a roam round, which was much better than staying indoors.

Not knowing how long she might like to stay out, she put on her hat and coat; yet after all she kept within bounds.

There was one spot to which she came, where she could see across to the bungalow. Her wistful gaze was just able to glimpse the low roof of the lonely residence, above its boundary fence, roughly a mile away. The very curling of smoke from the chimneys gave a homely, hospitable touch to the place that caused her heart more than one great pang.

"They're there by now, and so are the boys, I daresay. It will be nice, in that big sitting-room, Dave's mother is sure to make it awfully jolly for them!"

It occurred to her once again that the mystery behind the lifelong separation of son from mother had not yet been explained. Dave, surely, must have been told why it was that only in the last week or so had he been discovered by his mother. But he had not passed on the strange story to others.

Once again, too, as she sauntered on, doing a round of the school grounds, she recollected Dave's own little manifestation of sympathy for her—just

a few words, typical of the lad who was so given to silence. "I would like to send you a card at Christmas—may I?" And he would, even though this great and exciting change had come about in his life. His adoring mother would see that he had the very jolliest Christmas holidays; all the same—he would not forget.

Suddenly she stood stock still, in a startled way.

As if her mind, running upon Dave, had conjured up a kind of vision of him, she beheld him—coming towards her!

A schoolboy had whizzed in at the gateway, on a bicycle, and it was he. Companionless, he had now steered his bicycle on to the grass, to ride straight for her. She was still feeling surprised, when he hopped down from the machine, within speaking distance.

"Judy," he said. "Get your bike and come."

"Dave!" she said—and that was all she could say. "Come along," he insisted, in a masterful, big-brotherly way. "They won't start tea without you."

"Oh, you shouldn't have done this," she exclaimed, with regret. "I told Betty and the others—"

"Yes, I know. They did all they could to persuade you. But I said I would hop on the bike and fetch you; and I am not going back without you. Hurry up, there's a good kid!"

"Dave, listen! As I explained to the girls; it's true that I couldn't keep Cora away, by staying away myself. But at least she may not be so—so tiresome—if I'm not there."

"Can't help that," he stated flatly. "You're not always going to be done out of things. Supposing I were your brother; d'you think I'd allow it? Well, then!"

"Wait one moment," she said, and ran from him—as she was bound to do, unless he was to see her suddenly crying.

In the cycle shed she hurriedly dried her eyes, then dragged out her machine, mounted it, and rode back to him. It was typical of him that he said nothing. Equally typical was an ultimate remark, when they were quite halfway to the bungalow:

"We needn't hurry, Judy, if you want more time to get over it."

"Get over what, Dave?"

"Your crying."

Oh, he had noticed her eyes!

"I'm sorry," she gulped, riding, if anything, a little faster. "But just lately—"

"Yes, I know. You look all right now, anyhow."

Don't mind my saying so? If you like, Judy, I'll ride on, and you can follow."

"Then supposing I turned back!" she said, to laugh away her misery.

"I'd turn back to fetch you, that's all."

Their two machines purred along together, and in a few minutes boy and girl were at the bungalow porch. All the hub-bub of a party for young people was coming from the sitting-room, and they had to ring twice to make their arrival known. Then Naomer came dashing out to admit them.

"Hooray, he's brought her!" the dusky one yelled the news. "Queek, Judy, come on, bekas—tea!"

As many as could surge into the rather small entrance hall, did so.

"Tiresome girl!" Mrs. Cardew called Judith, but kissed her all the same.

"So there you are, Judy," was Jack Linton's hearty cry, and they shook hands. "That shows what a man can do." He clapped Dave on the shoulders. "Stout fellow!"

Mr. Gregory was there, and Judith, like the rest of the girls, could never have imagined that such a confirmed old bachelor—a lawyer, too!—could be so jolly. He was simply revelling in all the quips, specially delighting in the nonsense-talk going on between madcap Polly and her brother.

In the large sitting-room they all sat down to a "gorjus" tea. In fact, Naomer felt that word to be quite inadequate; but there was no time to think of another. She was too busy doing justice to the spread!

Although it was still quite light out of doors, a veranda roof rather dimmed the interior, and so Mrs. Cardew had caused the festive scene to be illumined with silk-shaded electric candles. A log fire flared chimneywards on the broad hearth, around which they made a half-circle, when tea was over.

"And now," Mrs. Cardew smiled upon Judith, dropping into a chair between that girl and Dave, "not sorry you came?"

"But aren't we almost too many for you?" was the best response Judith could make. She could not truthfully have said that she was glad to be here, for there had been a dozen instances already of Cora's graceless nature. Whilst Cora was delighting in being an annoyance, in her own way, Judith was bound to feel ashamed.

"It's a poor makeshift for a home, indeed," smiled Dave's mother. "My first job, in the New Year, must be to find somewhere better than this—mustn't it, Dave?"

"He doesn't mind!" cried Polly, gaily, for Dave had merely met his mother's eyes in response. "So long as he's got you!"

"Mrs. Cardew, how did it come about that you lost sight of Dave from the time he was a baby?" Cora asked bluntly.

Such an inquisitive question caused an uncomfortable silence. Betty and others would have liked to glare at Cora, for having used her strident voice in connection with a matter so private.

As for Judith, she turned hot with shame again. "Ah," Dave's mother murmured, staring into the fire, "that is a story I have not yet told my own boy even."

"Then I am sure it is not for us to expect to hear it now," declared Polly, casting a sideglance at Cora, who grinned back, quite unabashed. "This is like Christmas round the fire, and so—what about games—conundrums—"

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"A story would be better," Cora meaningly insisted. "Mrs. Cardew, do tell us! It must be so thrilling!"

"Shall I, then?" the lady questioned; and although many of the girls hastily demurred, she seemed to feel suddenly impelled to tell the story.

Something in her expression began to assure Betty and others that Mrs. Cardew would have ignored the request, since it had only come from Cora, whose peculiar nature had been marring the harmony all along; but there was this sudden inclination to disclose everything.

In the firelight, they saw her consult Mr. Gregory with her lovely eyes; and he nodded. At the same instant, Judith was aware of one of her hands being taken hold of by Mrs. Cardew and retained. Whether consciously or unconsciously, the lady was now holding one of her son's hands, and one of Judith's.

"It is only a very short story, after all," Mrs. Cardew prefaced softly. "Listen, then, and I will tell you how, years ago, my husband and I came to be robbed of our children."

"Your children!" Cora burst out excitedly. "Oh, had Dave, then—a sister?"

"Sh! Do be quiet, Cora," pleaded Betty.

There was silence at the fireside for a few moments; a silence that Judith felt she would have to interrupt with a cry—she hardly knew why.

Then Dave's mother spoke again, commencing the strange yet true story that was to hold every listener spellbound.

Told at the Fireside!

"WHEN I had been married only four years, my husband had to go out to the tropics," began Mrs. Cardew quietly. "He had big interests out there, and things had happened to render his presence imperative, although it meant a great risk to his health, for he had been seriously ill when out there before, and the doctors had warned him never to return."

"The risk to him was so great, I felt bound to go with him; but neither of us could think of taking our two mites of children—our Dave," added Mrs. Cardew, seeming to clasp the boy's hand tighter, "and his wee sister."

"Ah, he did have a sister, then!" jerked out Cora. "All right, girls, I'm only—so interested!"

"Then you might keep quiet," frowned Polly.

"We left our infant children in safe keeping, as we thought. There was a housekeeper in whom we had always placed implicit trust. She was to care for the children and see after everything for us, whilst we were away. But afterwards we found out what a ruthless woman she must have been, going to any length to achieve her wicked purpose."

"That woman must have made up her mind, even before my husband and I sailed from the Homeland, that she would make a rich haul as soon as our backs were turned. Where she was wickedly heartless, in her scheming, was in her plan for doing everything without exciting suspicion."

"A few hours before our boat was due to sail, she took the children away with her, telling those who were surprised that at the last moment Dave and his little sister were to go with us on the steamer. But they were never brought to us, at the docks. Instead, the woman abandoned them—made foundlings of them both."

Again it was Cora who burst out with an eager: "Where?"

"In Dave's case," spoke on Mrs. Cardew, "we

know now that he was left at the Foundling Hospital itself, and it ended in his being adopted by a very old and wealthy lady—a client of Mr. Gregory's."

"She died soon afterwards," Mr. Gregory took up the story, for a moment, "and I found myself made Dave's guardian under a will that left him everything. Hope I did my duty by you, Dave my boy!"

Dave looked up, meeting the lawyer's twinkling eyes, and smiled.

"But what about Dave's sister?" clamoured Cora. "I say, this is frightfully exciting!"

"The fate to which she was abandoned is unknown to this day," Mrs. Cardew answered tremulously. "I may find her yet! At any rate, I shall never, never give up hope; and, after all, I did trace my Dave at long last! All we can presume is that the two children were not abandoned together, in case it should lead to their being identified, if suspicion was aroused."

"As a matter of fact, no one at home dreamed that such a thing had been done. And out there in Africa my husband and I were in the same blissful ignorance for a long while. At last it all came out, by letter-writing, and we knew that that wretch of a woman had done this terrible thing."

"But why—why?" panted Cora, crouching forward in her fireside chair, so that her face, without her knowing it, caught every flicker of the logs.

"That, Cora, had been the first step in a scheme to rob and embezzle. By leading people at home to think that Dave and his sister had gone with their parents after all, the rest was made ten times easier. The woman dismissed the rest of the staff. She gave out that there had been last moment orders, on the boat, that the home was to be closed, she only remaining on, as caretaker. She remained for just so long as she could go on feathering her own nest, and then she vanished."

Mrs. Cardew made such a pause now as seemed to give all listeners full liberty to offer comments.

"Awful woman," broke from Madge.

"Yes, wather! Bai Jove, monstrous wotch!"

"Yes, bekas, fancy laying Dave on ze doorstep, somewhere, and zen doing a jolly old skeedaddle, just for ze sake of sweending!"

"Not that Dave looks any the worse for it now!" Polly made a point of maintaining that brighter tone which Naomer's outburst had caused.

"Can you imagine yourself, Dave, all done up in a shawl?"

"I guess he took it all quietly!" chuckled Jack. "Didn't you, old son? But I'm forgetting you're not that now; you're your mother's young son!"

Mrs. Cardew, obviously pleased at the talk becoming general, when it was being infused with such chummy goodwill, jumped up to stir the logs into an even cheerier blaze.

"Well, young people, now you know, and somehow I feel as if it's done me good to tell you! Which of you is the one who pays the piano so beautifully?"

"Madge! Madge!" was the lively chorus.

"Come on then, Madge! And if we take a few of the chairs into the other room, we might even get a dance!"

"Gorjus!" yelled Naomer, promptly snatching up her chair; and, finding Paula in the way, she pushed that long-suffering one aside by digging her playfully in the ribs with the legs of the chair.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Gregory, after tapping out his pipe, turned round upon Judith.

"You're very quiet, young lady!"

"Am I, sir? I—I was thinking about Mrs. Cardew's story," was the faltered answer. "So strange!"

"Ah, it's a strange world, my dear," nodded the grey-haired lawyer, pocketing his pipe. "Stranger things than what you have been told are happening every day. Mrs. Cardew might have told you of something else, just as strange, that happened only yesterday."

Judith's round eyes said: "Really?"

"When you came here, bringing a note," said Mr. Gregory, taking Judith by the hand as if he would like to dance with her; now that the piano had started. "When Mrs. Cardew noticed that you had that mark on your wrist—an old scar—just where Dave's own baby sister was scarred, at six months' old! Wasn't that strange?"

Judy looked up at the lawyer in obvious wonderment

He laughed.

"But come along, little Miss Judy. If it were one of those newfangled dances, I don't think I could! But that's a charming waltz your schoolmate is playing, and so—"

"If you please, sir, I—I don't think I will," Judith excused herself, so faintly that her voice was hardly audible amidst the general chatter. "It feels hot in here—so terribly hot—"

Her Double Gain!

In the middle of the night, sleepless Judith Grandways decreed for herself an end to all agitating uncertainty. No need to let doubt torment her, as it had been doing! No need to be prey to the tantalising, wistful thought; if only her wish could prove true. For it was so—must be so!

She was Dave's own sister!

So, whilst others slept, she remained wide-awake, a great tide of happiness flowing through heart and mind alike. No need to fear a single hitch; only the need to wait until she had got to what, for the present, she must still think of as "home."

She could not entertain any idea of speaking to Mrs. Cardew before the matter had been gone into at home. It was all a delicate business, and she feared that in any case Cora and Hetty would be in hot water for having divulged the great secret. To go ahead herself without first consulting those at home, might cause a bigger row than ever.

Never mind, only a few days now! School broke up next week. She would travel home with Hetty and Cora, and then—

"Yes, directly I get indoors!" she said to herself determinedly. "Why not? It isn't as if they

can have any cause for being miserable on my account, when I shall be telling them—I know who my mother is, and where she can be found!"

Would there have been misery at home, even if it had not been possible to tell them that? Judith wondered! More than ever, now, she was realising what an absence of any real parental affection for her there had been.

At the same time, she could overlook that all the easier. There was nothing to forgive—now. If there had been no real love for her, that was only because parental love was not her due. A relief to both sides! That was what it would certainly be.

A few more days—only a few more days and nights, and then—a new life altogether! Even though she came back to Morcove next term—and oh, how she would long to do that!—it would still be such a different life for her, in the school itself.

No longer Cora's sister, but Dave's! It seemed too wonderful, too good to be true, yet it must be so. Oh, I'm certain!"

She felt so certain, she wanted to wake up Betty and others, simply to tell them. All that she would like to say to them, in a thrilling whisper, was composing itself in her mind.

"I began to feel it whilst Mrs. Cardew was telling her story. It suddenly rushed upon me that she had seemed oh, very strange in her attitude to me. And then the scar—the scar! That convinced me! Oh, girls, how I longed to cry-out, in front of the lawyer and all of you, that I might easily be Dave's sister, for I knew that I wasn't a Grandways."

But there it was; for just a little while

longer she must be patient and silent. It was all coming to her in the end—that was the great thing. That dear, kind-hearted lady for her own loving mother—and Dave for a brother! No more harsh words and slighting looks from those at home. At school, complete freedom from Cora, without any further need for submitting to her domineering ways.

On the way back to school, after that fateful gathering at the bungalow, she and her chums had heard the church-bells ringing in Barncombe. The ringers were practising Yuletide peals. Her last sensation, as she now sank to sleep, was that of joy-bells still ringing in her head!

From dreams of a Christmas-time that would be full of happiness for her, after all, she awoke to a frosty, sunny Sabbath morning. The dormitory was fairly shouting—what a morning it was! One or two girls had parents who were



"You're pretty uppish this morning, aren't you?" Cora Grandways sneered at Judith. "I've reason to be!" Judith answered quietly, and walked on.

coming by car to fetch them away to-day, by special permission; but even for the rest it was going to be a day charged with joy.

Naomer was belaying sleepy Paula extra-hard with a pillow, drawing squeals from the long-suffering one.

"Naomer," said Polly, in her best mock-reproving tone, "that is not the way to begin Sunday!"

"I am not beginning Sunday; I am beginning ze hols.!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Somebody started a Christmas carol, and the dormitory took it up. Then Polly joined in with a very effective imitation of the Barncombe brass band.

Betty caught Judith's eye during this amusing improvisation, and Judith burst out laughing. But even that burst of laughter could not tell the captain and others how wonderfully happy Judith felt this morning.

She found herself at one of the dormitory-windows, gazing across to the bungalow. They were already astir over there. Smoke was rising from the chimneys. And now she could even see—dared she use the word "mother," even to herself? Yes, why not! There was mother, stepping from the porch to saunter down to the entrance-gateway—oh, and she could tell why! Dave and Jack were coming back from a very early walk.

Suddenly Naomer came to Judith's elbow, saucily inquiring:

"What you looking at? Ooo!" the dusky one shouted, as her gaze followed Judith's. "I can see Jack and Dave, girls! Hi, compliments of ze season!" she vociferated, waving gaily out of window.

The boys, of course, were too far off to hear the cry; but of their own accord they and Dave's mother must have looked towards Morcove School a moment later, for the girls saw them waving.

Nor was this bright winter's day much older before Morcove saw them again. Mrs. Cardew brought the boys to the brief morning service. In the Fourth Form pews there was quite a rustle of suppressed delight when the lady went before Dave and Jack to those seats always set apart for chance visitors.

As for Judith, she could hardly take her eyes off mother and son during the singing. Life, suddenly, had become sweet and joyful, whereas it had been all harshness and nagging and misery in the past.

Soon the girls were trooping out, Form by Form, and the usual skittish dispersal took place. The headmistress had engaged Dave's mother in talk, whilst Dave and Jack lost no time in joining Betty & Co., with whom Judith was keeping.

"Glorious morning!" remarked some of the girls.

"Gorjus!"

"But Dave and I have got to start back for Grangemoor early this afternoon," Jack pretended to grumble.

"You've had your treat!" said Polly saucily. "And besides, think of all the prizes you're going to see given to other fellows!"

"Here's the chap for prizes," he said, bringing a hand down so heavily upon Dave's shoulders, that the latter had to appear to crumple up. "The bungalow will never hold them all."

"Shan't be there," said Dave, wonderfully informative for once.

"Where will you be for the hols., Dave?" asked Judith.

"Hallo, Judy," he smiled. "Don't know." And

after a look from his serious eyes: "So that's how you feel this morning?"

"You seem to know how I feel, then!" she laughed.

"Haven't I always said," chimed in Polly, "Dave knows everything!"

But Judith thought:

"You're wrong, Polly; there's one thing Dave doesn't know—I know!"

Presently Mrs. Cardew sauntered up, returning the juniors' lively greeting very gaily.

"You two boys are saying good-bye for the present, are you?"

"We are," groaned Jack. He took out his handkerchief and dabbed it to his eyes whilst approaching his madcap sister. "Goo-goo-bye, Polly!"

"Idiot!"

"Don't," he moaned; "don't keep on reminding me that I'm your brother! And now, my child," suddenly changing to a grown-up tone, "I hope you have made up your mind to be a good little girl in the holidays. I have seen your headmistress and arranged for special holiday tasks! I am sorry I shall have no Christmas present for you, but owing to the pound—you understand?"

"Oh, quite," Polly nodded sweetly, keeping the rest on the chuckle. "That's why I am not giving you anything. And—Jack—"

He came stiffly to attention.

"Here's sixpence, to buy yourself some sweets," Polly said patronisingly. "I dropped it during service and couldn't find it until after the collection was taken up."

Jack spun the sixpence and caught it.

"Heads! That means snow at Christmas, and a jolly time for all of us, hurrah!"

And, screwing the sixpence into his left eye, he marched away, throwing his chest out in military style.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bye, Judy," said Dave, turning to her last of all. "I may send you that card at Christmas, mayn't I?"

"But I don't think you will," she predicted.

"Why not?"

"Ah, that's one thing you don't know," said Judith, with a merriment that surprised her school-mates as much as it puzzled Dave.

She was feeling sure that Christmas would find her under the same roof with Dave and—mother.

"You're looking bonny this morning, Judy!" commented Mrs. Cardew, conferring a farewell smile. "Come and see me soon!"

"I will," sparkled Judith—and she very nearly added: "mother!"

Going indoors a few minutes later, she went by Cora and Hetty, who eyed her uneasily.

"Come here," said Cora curtly. "You're pretty uppish this morning, aren't you?"

"I've reason to be," answered Judith—and walked on.

Then Cora and Hetty turned to each other worriedly. Where they stood, just then, was no place for discussing anything of a secret nature, so they went up to the study.

"Bother," muttered Cora, as soon as they were alone together. The girl has gone and got hold of the same idea that I've had!"

Hetty was biting a lip.

"So long as your father and mother don't kick up a fuss, Cora! But—I don't know; I begin to feel it was a mistake, my telling you in the first instance. Anyhow, I do wish you had never told Judy!"

"Oh, well—bother Judy," shrugged Cora.

"What do I care if she is going to come out of it all right! And, after all, what is there for a girl to find that she's got a brother in a fellow like that solemn old owl of a Dave! I thought I had a sister, and that was trouble enough. Catch me envying any girl who has—a brother, huh!"

Judith entered, just as Hetty was gesturing Cora not to speak so loudly.

"Yes," Judith said, as she stepped to take up a book, "you should be more careful, Cora. I could hear, as I came in. Your father and mother may not like it, if they find the whole thing public property, before—"

"Oh, shut up," snapped Cora. "It's only a day or two now, anyway! I suppose you mean to tell them at home, directly you get there?"

"I do!"

"But—Judy—"

But Judith was passing out again, and she would not turn back. No need to have any arguments; they would only end in an upset, marring the wonderful happiness that had come to her.

In the corridor somebody playfully knocked the book out of her hands as she was reading it.

"Can't you ever give up your books?" the madcap gaily demanded. Come along to Study 12, Judy!"

"Yes, bekas—ze refresher before dinner!" came Naomer's inviting cry. "Just to show there is no ill-feeling!"

So Judith sampled the dusky one's own patent blend, and stayed with the chums until the gong went. After dinner Betty & Co. were going for a sharp walk, and Judith, invited to join them, said:

"Oh, rather!"

"Let's make it along under the cliffs, girls," Betty proposed. "Our last visit to the shore this term very likely!"

"And back, up the zig-zag that brings you out near Cliff Edge," rejoined Polly heartily. "An early start, because the days are so short."

"What you smiling for, Judy?" inquired Naomer.

"Can't make Judy out to-day!" commented Helen Craig.

Judith had smiled, thinking how lovely it would be simply to go past the bungalow, during the walk. They would not see Dave and Jack again, and must not dream of inflicting themselves upon Mrs. Cardew. But—simply to saunter by that spot, knowing that she was there.

"The hundreds of times I have been past Cliff Edge," Judith was saying to herself, as she dressed for the afternoon walk, "never dreaming that some day it would be as home to me."

At that very instant she heard herself being inquired for. Then a schoolmate, who must have been told to seek her in this cloak-room, came dashing up. It was Helen Craig.

"Judy—Judy! Here's your mother!"

"What!"

For the moment, Judith supposed that the great secret was out, and that the one she had come to think of as mother was here in the school—to claim her!

"Mrs. Grandways is in a car," Helen Craig added. "She is getting down at the door now!"

Only a Dream!

JUDITH felt giddy. Her first attempt to pull herself together proved futile. She was still in a staggered state when she saw a familiar figure coming across to her.

Helen Craig flitted, calling behind as she ran off.

"I'll tell the other girls, Judy; you won't be coming now!"

Then it was for Judith to answer the voice that said coldly:

"Well, Judith, I've given you a surprise. And Cora—where is she?"

"Er—upstairs, most likely, unless—unless she and Hetty have already gone out."

"We will go up and see," Mrs. Grandways remarked. "But don't look like that, Judith! Can't you seem a little pleased to see your own mother? Strange girl, if ever there was! You may kiss me," came the after-thought; and the handsome head was lowered to receive the dutiful salute.

But Mrs. Grandways did not trouble to return the kiss. She instantly straightened herself, saying rather loudly:

"I have motored down, feeling I would like a few days' rest and change before I start my Christmas shopping. I am staying at the County Hotel in Barncombe. You girls will go home with me, of course, when school breaks up."

Judith's receiving all this in silence caused Mrs. Grandways to exclaim impatiently:

"Well? Really, Judith, do pull yourself together!"

Then, with a return towards that composure which Judith had been showing Hetty and Cora just lately, she conducted the surprise visitor upstairs. Many scholars were coming down, but there was an austerity about Mrs. Grandways that forbade remarks in passing. More than once, however, after two or three girls had gone by, Judith could hear them remarking amongst themselves:

"That was Mrs. Grandways—Judith's mother! Are they going away before breaking-up day?"

NEXT WEEK—


Another extra-long thrilling tale of the chums of Morcove School will appear in the

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The Luck Judith Deserved!



By Marjorie Stanton

The corridor was reached, and as Judith led the way along it, she could feel herself growing rapidly calmer. There had been no need to feel so upset. All the better that a thing like this had happened, for now she could go into matters at once.

She threw open the study-door and saw at once that the room was deserted.

"They must have gone out; but—but please don't go downstairs again yet," pleaded Judith, in a tone that drew upon her a look of wonderment. "I want to have a talk with you—at once."

So Mrs. Grandways swished into the study, turning upon Judith with another brusque:

"Well?"

"I—I hardly know how to begin—"

"But begin, anyhow," exclaimed Mrs. Grandways, pettishly. "For I have no time to waste. Miss Somerfield knows that I am here, I daresay, and is ready to see me."

Judith closed the door.

"It is something that I was going to tell you about, as soon as I got home," she resumed huskily. "Very strange things have happened lately about—about—I mean, between Cora and myself."

"You've been quarrelling, have you? I don't call that strange!" Mrs. Grandways laughed mirthlessly. "Well?"

"Cora has been telling me that I—that I'm—no longer her sister."

"What?"

"I should say, that I never was her sister really. She says—she had it from Hetty, who seemed able to prove that—you only adopted me."

A great pause. Mrs. Grandways had given the most violent start, and her handsome face had gone marble-white. Her eyebrows, thin as the stroke of a pen, were closely drawn together.

She stared at Judith, unable to speak, her breath coming and going sharply.

"You only adopted me," Judith repeated tensely. "That's what I've been told."

"Indeed! And you believed it, did you?"

"Oh, not at first!" was the answer. "It seemed too—too strange to be true!"

"So I should think!" exclaimed Mrs. Grandways fiercely. "Of all the lunacy! I can't think what Hetty and Cora have been about, to put such an idea into your head! How dared they! Oh, but of course," with a shrug and a smile, "they were only teasing you!"

"No," Judith dissented, with returning agitation. "They declared it was true. And I could tell, in the end, that far from being a joke of theirs, they—they saw how serious it all was."

"That was because you had swallowed the nonsense!"

"I don't think so."

"But you did believe it in the end?"

"Yes, I did."

"Then all I can say is, you must have wanted to believe it," came from Mrs. Grandways furiously. "And that's a nice thing for a mother to know about her daughter! Have I been such a bad mother to you then, that you could hope that it was true? Haven't you had such a home as I'm sure not another girl in this school—except your sister Cora—can show? The money that's been lavished upon you!"

"I know," Judith said gently, her underlip quivering; "it has been a very grand home. There has been money for everything. But—money isn't everything, is it?"

"I'd like to know what more a girl could want than what you've had! But there always has been that about you, Judith, and the older you get the worse you become! Always going about as if pining for something else. As your own sister has been forced to complain—a misery, that's what you are, a misery!"

Judith blinked away the tears that had come to her lashes.

"It's quite true, I own now, I have been miserable," she said, in great grief. "Both at home and at school. You wouldn't understand, but others can. As my sister, Cora might have been different to me, I do think. I have done all I can for her. And—and—"

"Well, what?"

"Oh, I'm not going to say it, I can't!" poor Judith sobbed. "You tell me that it's all wrong, what I was told the other day, and so, I suppose—"

"You suppose you must believe me? Me, your own mother!" was the indignant cry. "Really, Judith! But it's too absurd," Mrs. Grandways laughed, in a strung-up manner. "What, do you really imagine that I simply adopted you, as a child? I would be very sorry by now, if I had, let me tell you that!"

"Then—"

"Then what, Judith—"

They were meeting each other's eyes again.

"I must never, never allow myself to—"

"To imagine things? You had better not! If I have said it it is pure nonsense, Judith, who is there to contradict me? What right has anyone? No, indeed; and after this—"

"Very well—mother," said Judith, using the word for the first time during the painful scene.

Shakily she reached a hand to the doorknob, opening the door to let Mrs. Grandways pass out.

"I shall find Miss Somerfield, Judith. You had better find Cora and Hetty!"

"Very well—mother."

Mrs. Grandways passed out very quickly, but only to come to a standstill in the lobby. Not yet could she let her face be seen, for she knew what a haggard, fear-haunted look it held. She had to pause like this, to get over the shock that it had been, to know that Judith had learned—the truth!

A desperate denial had saved the situation, at present; even so, Mrs. Grandways trembled for herself and her husband. And well she might! Time has a way of making truth triumphant after all, and—who could tell? How could she be sure that Judith would not be able to prove, some day, that she really was only an adopted child!

"Judith!"

"Yes—mother?"

"You quite understand? After what I have said, you must never again imagine, even for a moment, that you are not my daughter! You hear me?"

"Yes—mother."

Again Mrs. Grandways went away, and this time she smiled a haggard, crafty smile.

As for Judith, alone again in the study, she put a hand up to her head, sweeping fingers through her hair. There was a despairing look in her young face.

Then she dropped down into a chair and cried, quietly, into her hands.

She might have known it would be so! Only a dream, after all!

(END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.)