

DON'T
MISS

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"MORGOVE'S MOORLAND QUEST!"

BY MARJORIE
STANTON—WITHIN

The SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN 2^d



"STOP THIS DANCING
—AT ONCE!"

A dramatic incident from the long,
complete tale of the chums of Mor-
cove School—within.

What Unexpected Thrills Are Betty and Co.'s in This Grand School Tale!

MORCOVE'S MOORLAND QUEST!



Torn between her love for her chums, Betty Barton and Co. of the Fourth, and loyalty to the mysterious boy she has befriended, it is an unenviable predicament in which Dolly Delane finds herself. And try as she will, Dolly can find no solution to her difficulty, until "Mike the Mysterious" himself comes to the rescue—but in the very last way that kind-hearted Dolly would have wished!

Betty's Brain-Wave!

"GIRLS, girls, what do you think?"

"Yes, Betty. Yes, do tell us!"

"Yes, plis, queak, queak!"

"Well, you know the Round House?" began Betty Barton breathlessly.

"Of course. What about it? Don't keep me in suspense any longer," broke in Polly Linton excitedly.

"All right. I'm trying to tell you," laughed Form-captain Betty. "I know how we can manage to get there to-night to explore. There! Isn't that thrilling?"

"Honest, Betty?" gasped Polly. "Special permish, or what? It's dark now, you know."

Betty Barton chuckled.

"'Fraid not, Polly," she smiled. "We'll have to take a bit of a risk, but it's for Morcove's sake. Are you game?"

Game! Madcap Polly was always game for anything that savoured of adventure. But the Round House! Her eyes sparkled. It was the Round House that was so intriguing the chums of Study 12 these days.

Only a few hours ago they had found a note there, a note signed by someone named "Emily," making an appointment to meet a person by the name of "Mike."

Eight o'clock had been the time mentioned on the missive as the hour for the meeting, but then the great question had been: how were the Study 12 pair to get there at that time of night?

By Marjorie Stanton

For get there they had decided they must. It was up to them.

After mysterious robberies in the school, by someone from outside, the chums had managed to track down the person they thought to be the thief to the lonely old Round House on the moor nearby.

And then to find that note. It had been the greatest stroke of good luck. Signed "Mike," too.

"I'll say I'm game!" enthused Polly now. "But, Betty, wasn't it jolly mysterious, too, about those coins of Pam's that were returned to you through the post? And by someone named 'Mike.'"

"Yes, just what I was thinking of," agreed Betty. "That's why I'm so excited we can get across to the Round House now. We may see him and learn where the money we collected for the hospital Christmas trees. Perhaps he'll help us to get that back."

"Per-haps," said Polly doubtfully. "But say, Betty, how do we manage to get out of school? Miss Somerfield's extra strict just now, knowing there may be a thief hanging about the neighbourhood."

"It's like this," whispered Betty, going to the door to see it was fast shut. "Miss Somerfield has invited Dolly Delane's Aunt Ada to dine with her at the school this evening."

"Well?" queried madcap Polly Linton. "How does that help?"

The Form gave Polly a mock-weary smile.

"You'll ask me next why Dolly has an aunt staying with her. You'll pretend you've forgotten that dear old Paula is also staying with Dolly at the cottage, as a day girl, while Dolly's parents are away."

"Why, of course! I remember we drew lots, and Paula had the winning ticket. The mist lifts from my work-weary brain," breathed Polly dramatically.

"Good! Then I'll go on. When Miss Somerfield sends her car in a few minutes to fetch Miss Addison from the Delanes' cottage, it would mean that Dolly and Paula Creel would be alone in the cottage until Miss Addison got back. And Miss Somerfield thinks that one or two of us should keep them company. So now, what about it?"

"Goodness!" breathed Polly. "I see all now."

"Yes, bekas—"

"It's a wonderful bit of luck!" marvelled Betty. "That note we found at the Round House makes the appointment with the fellow Mike at eight exactly."

"And Miss Addison sits down to dinner here at the school," rejoined Polly gaily, "at eight to-night."

The madcap did a little waltz round the room.

"Splendid! No harm in our making good use of the time, while keeping Dolly and Paula company," she laughed.

"They'll go with us, of course; simply love to, because there's a thrill in it all, you know."

"Thrill! I should say so," exclaimed Pam Willoughby, who had just entered. "And I only wish I were going. We've been so puzzled by that fellow Mike. First we thought he must have been the fellow who robbed the school; then we found him telling us where some of the stolen stuff could be found—"

"Buried at the old Round House on the moor," Polly threw in, with another nod. "And that's where Mike, whoever he is, will meet 'Emily,' whoever she may be, at eight this evening."

"My suspicion," said Betty, "is that 'Emily' had something to do with the robbery. Mike got back what he could of the stolen stuff from her perhaps. And that's why I do feel we ought to follow things up. After all, the school is still a bad loser by the robbery."

"And might lose something else, even yet," remarked Helen Craig. "Oh, yes, we ought to carry on."

"Bekas, eef you get hold of em both this evening you can put ze wind up them. Scare zem stiff."

A few minutes later madcap and captain were enjoying the luxury of a ride in Miss Somerfield's fine saloon car for the mere mile or so to the cottage.

Very pretty in the darkness looked that tiny, thatched dwelling, with its lattice windows showing lamplight upon the closed curtains, when the two girls got down at the gate. The chauffeur, to save time, turned the car round instantly, whilst Betty and Polly ran up the flagged path.

The madcap was in the mood to give a hearty pounding upon the door, but she paused at a sound of a nagging voice from the interior.

"And I don't want any idleness, remember," Aunt Ada was saying to Dolly and Paula. "The fact that Miss Somerfield has sent two of your schoolmates to keep you company while I am away—that need not mean idleness and talk."

"It won't," Polly whispered to Betty outside the cottage. "It will mean the greatest activity—only we are not going to tell Aunt Ada that."

"Sh!" cautioned Betty with a chuckle.

Their arrival had been made known by the purr of the car as it turned on the road. Suddenly the cottage door was opened by Miss Ada Addison, dressed primly for dining out, and looking bonier than ever with only a velvet wrap thrown about her evening gown.

She had no welcoming smile for Betty and Polly.

"Huh! So you are the two—"

"Yes, Miss Addison!" smiled Betty.



"Dolly, will that boy George be here again in the morning?" Aunt Ada demanded, as she moved to the door. "Yes, Auntie," Dolly answered calmly; but none of the chums knew what an effort it cost her.

"Come in, and I leave the four of you to spend, I hope, a useful, profitable time. Have you brought any evening school-work with you?"

"I'm afraid not," said Betty.

"But perhaps," said Polly eagerly, "there is a game of snakes and ladders we can play? Or Halma! I adore Halma!"

"Games, whether parlour games or outdoor, are overdone by you girls. It is one of the things I am going to tell your headmistress when I dine with her presently. I have discovered," said Aunt Ada in a pained voice, "that Paula Creel cannot do her own mending. I shall be back at nine-fifty, so that you two girls can return in the car and be in by ten."

"Yes, Miss Addison."

The lady, snuggling the wrap closer about her angular figure, was passing out to the car; but suddenly she turned back.

"Dolly."

"Yes, Aunt Ada?"

"I didn't see that boy George before he knocked off work at dusk. Has he done everything? And is he coming again in the morning?"

"He will be here, yes, auntie."

"I thought he might be, after all, one of those good-for-nothings to whom one day's work in a week is quite enough."

"I hope you have a happy evening, auntie," cried Dolly, keeping the door open so that light would flow forth, enabling Miss Addison to see her way to the wicket-gate. "Good-bye for the present."

There was no response to this, and Betty and Polly thought that this was why Dolly, when she turned to them in the cottage sitting-room after closing the outer door looked unhappy.

"Poor old Dolly!" exclaimed Polly. "Really, Dolly, that aunt of yours gives me a pain in the neck."

Yes, wather! Tewwible!" came Paula's groan, as she dropped back into a fireside chair. "Oh, geals, geals, the relief—to be free from that woman's tongue at last!"

"But, Dolly," said Betty with a little eagerness, "who is that boy George? We didn't know there was a boy working about the place. 'George'? Who is 'George'?"

After Dark!

DOLLY DELANE, Morcove's only day scholar in normal times, gave a little laugh.

She had had little enough to laugh about during the past few days, it is true. Mother and father away on a well-earned holiday, she had looked forward to the coming of her Auntie Ada. And how was Dolly, who had not seen the lady for many years, to know that she was—well, what she was!

Dolly had thought it would be a real little treat for one of the Study 12 chums to spend the time with her, enjoying all the privileges of a day girl during her parents' absence. And to Paula had fallen the honour.

How Dolly wished now that she had never made the suggestion that one of the chums should stay with her.

Apart from Aunt Ada's unlikeable nature, and that was bad enough, surely at no worse time could there have been this excuse for Betty & Co to visit her so frequently at her home.

Much as she loved these chums of hers, and much as she would have welcomed them in the ordinary way, this week everything was different.

For she had Mike to think of now. And it was

that question of theirs: "Who is George?" that brought out that dimple on Dolly's bonny cheeks now, in spite of the ache in her heart.

"George? Oh, he's only some boy auntie has taken on. Auntie was cross because old Dan! has got laid up with rheumatism, so she—she offered this boy a temporary place."

"What boy?" asked Polly.

"George."

"Yes, but what I mean is, where does he come from? Barncombe? Goes home every evening, I suppose?"

"He's a worker, I know that," said Dolly, and not one of the others noticed any evasion. "Even Aunt Ada can hardly find fault with him."

"Ah," said Polly, "he's a boy! Aunts always think more highly of boys—mother's the same, for that matter."

"Bai Jove, you geals," beamed Paula, making great use of pocket-comb and mirror, now that Miss Addison was out of the way, "the boy George is a wegular mawvel, yes, wather; So obliging. I have had my shoes cleaned for me."

"What did Aunt Ada say to that?" chuckled Betty.

"Er—at pwsent Dolly's Aunt Ada is in ignoavance."

"Better let her stay so," said Polly. "I've a hunch George is not paid to look after you two girls—the idea! What's his full name, Dolly?"

"I don't know," was the truthful answer. "I'm calling him George Washington."

"For the weason, geals, that Dolly has gweat weliance upon his vewacity, yes, wather!"

"What a mouthful," sighed Polly. "You mean, he cannot tell a fib." She turned to Betty. "I say, it must be fun to be here and attend school by day. A boy to wait on them now."

"You haven't any Aunt Ada," laughed Dolly. "Thank goodness!" murmured Polly beneath her breath.

"Aunt Ada," Dolly went on, "thinks everybody should do their share. That George's place is outside, and ours, alas, is in! There should be no waiting one upon the other; but life is real and life—See? Or shall I continue in my best poetical voice?"

"No, thanks," Betty and Polly laughed together, and Polly added: "We may not have an Aunt Ada, but we still have our Naomer. But enough," she went on dramatically. "The hour has come. We must away."

This, whilst it caused Paula Creel to sit bolt upright, agape, drew a startled look from Dolly.

"It's like this, you two," smiled Betty. "We want you to lock up the cottage and come with us to the old Round House."

"Do what, bai Jove!" gasped Paula. "The Round House?"

"It's only a few minutes from here on the moor, and the night is fine," Betty urged. "And you know what we told you when we were across here just before afternoon school. We do feel it's up to us to look out for that Emily person when she meets Mr. Mike at the appointed time."

"Dolly doesn't want to go with us," Polly commented on that girl's troubled looks. "Oh, but, Dolly, don't be a spoil-sport! That's not like you. We can't leave you alone in the cottage—not even you and Paula."

"We were sent to keep you company," laughed Betty. "And so long as we are all four together—why, there you are!"

Paula chuckled.

"Weally, I must expwess my surpwise at the

Form-captain wesowting to, shall I say, such awful weasoning."

"You may say what you like, but not now," Polly ruled. "On with your things, girls. For you will come, both of you, won't you?"

"Er—yes," was Dolly Delane's rather faltering answer, "since you are so determined.

After a moment Betty carried on the talk.

"We don't want to make trouble for anyone, Dolly. But the school has never recovered the stolen collection money. And the thief is still at large. Supposing it's this Emily person? Supposing Emily takes it into her head to commit another robbery?"

"Oh, I know!" exclaimed Dolly distressfully. "And I quite understand."

"Better for us girls to face Emily than for the police to collar her," the Form-captain submitted. "She might go to prison then. This mysterious Mike fellow, too."

Dolly at once turned to Paula with a sign that they would get their outdoor things on.

Elegant Paula promptly ran upstairs to the room which she had been given at the cottage, but rather to Betty and Polly's surprise, Dolly Delane went through to the kitchen and out into the night.

* * * * *

ON TIPTOE Dolly Delane ran across the night-bound yard behind the cottage to one of the numerous outbuildings.

She lifted the wooden latch to the shed door and put her head just inside the pitch-dark building, whispering:

"Mike, you there?"

Not the faintest sound came in response.

"Mike!" she whispered again. "Michael George!"

Again there was silence.

Distractedly Dolly walked about the shed. Could Mike be gone? Oh, surely not!

"Mike!" she called again.

Still no reply.

"Oh!" Dolly moaned aloud.

Then this could mean only one thing. Mike, the boy she had befriended, the boy she trusted with her whole heart, had gone.

And where?

"He's at the Round House now!" Dolly whispered in agony. "What—oh, what can I do?"

How could she prevent them from meeting? How could she prevent suspicion from falling on this lad whom, she felt sure, was as honest as the day.

If only she could tell her chums everything, tell them that Mike was her friend, that she trusted him. That appearances might be against him; he might even be suspected of being a thief; but he was innocent.

They would understand then at once. They'd do everything to help.

But she could not tell them. There was her promise to Mike to think of.

Not that Mike would have made her promise for his own sake alone; only someone else was involved, someone very dear to him perhaps.

At that moment Dolly could have buried her head in her arms and cried.

But she mustn't, she mustn't! For Mike's sake she must think of something, some way by which Betty & Co. would never see him face to face.

* * * * *

THE OLD thatched cottage showed lamplight in all its ground-floor windows when the four girls

set forth upon their strange mission, after locking up.

Dolly Delane had left a lamp burning in the sitting-room and another in the kitchen.

The night was moonless, and an overcast sky denied them all starlight. Betty had called it a fine evening, and there was certainly no more mist than was to be expected on the best of evenings at this late season of the year.

In silence they stepped away, and although Betty, Polly and Paula regarded this silence as simply necessary to the thrilling excursion, to Dolly Delane it seemed far different.

Exchanging no word with them as she kept in step with her three schoolmates she felt as if a tension had arisen. Almost she had fallen out with them over this business.

And yet—

It was imperative that they should be baulked in their endeavour. They meant well. Their purpose was laudable; it arose from their devotion to Morcove's interests. But they did not know what she knew.

Tell them then? No; that had been out of the question all along. For one thing, she had been as good as put upon her honour not to say a word. For another thing, it did not seem right to involve these chums of hers in matters that were far, far more serious than the affair of the robbery at the school, serious though that had been.

One course only was open to her. At this last moment she must, by hook or crook, prevent the girls from seeing or hearing anything that might be going to transpire at that ruinous old building out here on the open moor.

In wary manner they waded over the heather, with little else than a sense of direction to guide them. Even where they had some narrow foot-path to traverse it was like any of the other narrow tracks that criss-crossed the rough moor everywhere.

The ground dipped before them all at once, and as they went one behind another down into this shallow hollow there came the first whisper from Polly.

"We're all right, girls; this hollow is between the cottage and the Round House."

"Bit mistier down here," murmured Betty.

Then an idea came to Dolly's desperate mind. Perhaps the ground mist, thin though it was, could aid her.

She brisped up her step and became the first to take the rising ground on the other side of the hollow. Then in secret agitation she set off along a faint track that would never take them all to the ruined building.

"Sh, Dolly, where are you going?" Polly instantly whispered.

"This path—"

"That won't take us to the Round House."

"You follow me," she said with desperate composure. "I know the moor."

"Better than we know it?" Polly returned. "Oh, all right, have your own way, Dolly. But if you go wide of the Round House I know someone who will be cross."

Dolly looked round to show them a smiling face in the darkness; but when she turned again, still keeping the lead over ground where it was so easy to go astray she looked most unhappy.

For a certainty now Polly was going to be cross with her presently. They were all going to be wild with her. And they were her chums.

Not to be helped. Her own happy relations with these schoolmates of hers must not be considered now. She knew what she was about, and why.

How much more was her aid owing to the boy Mike, or George—for Mike and George were one and the same—when only a day or so ago she had disappointed him by losing faith in him.

On they went, walking as silently and warily as was possible, the others leaving her to guide them. And every step of the way they were now going was taking them wider of the mark.

She knew it was so, and could only rejoice. Never mind the reproaches and even the quarrel to come; she was achieving her desperate purpose after all.

Suddenly, however, a detaining hand reached hold of her, pulling her to a standstill.

"Dolly, this isn't the way!" protested Polly softly.

"It really isn't, Dolly," came Betty's murmur. "We should have got to the Round House by now. Besides, I can tell we are going much too much to the right. You'll bring us out in Barncombe before you've done."

"Bai Jove, I was wather wondering," said Paula, "how much farther!"

"We've come all wrong," fumed Polly. "And the mist is thickening. Oh, goodness, nice thing if we get quite lost in the end."

She faced this way and that perplexedly, then pointed convincingly.

"That's the way we must go, and sharp about it, too."

Even as she said it from the distant school-house came the ding-dong of bells, then the hour-bell tolled.

"Eight o'clock!" sighed Betty. "And that was the time for the appointment."

"We've missed everything!" Polly said fiercely under her breath. "When we had such a splendid chance, too. This is your fault, Dolly!"

"Yes."
"And you don't even say you're sorry. Really, you are enough to make anyone cross," stamped Morcove's always headstrong junior. "But come on; we'll go my way now. We may be in time, after all."

Betty showed herself every bit as eager as was Polly to take the altered course in the misty darkness; that pair went ahead swiftly together, whilst Dolly had Paula glancing at her regretfully as they followed.

"Gweat pity this, Dolly," commented Paula gently. "Wather spoils the whole thing for us, what?"

"I—I can't help that," was Dolly's candid response.

During the next few minutes she constantly heard Polly fuming to herself. But as a set-off to the certainty of a coming row between her, Dolly, and the madcap, there was the comforting knowledge that she had succeeded after all. For Mike had known that girls from the school were hoping to be at the Round House by eight. It had been possible to warn him about that. What had been impossible was a cancellation of his appointment with the person whom he had to meet.

Dolly's only hope had been that he could meet that person at the appointed time and then say: "Come away—quick!"

Dolly suddenly smiled to herself in the darkness as she trudged on with Paula behind Betty and Polly. The smile was one of tremen-

dous relief. Yes, she had done Mike a good turn this evening. Never mind the cost to herself; he would be gone from the Round House by the time they—

Bump, she almost went into Betty, who had stopped abruptly because Polly had stopped. All four of them—they were suddenly at a standstill.

Next second Polly turned round and made frantic signs.

"Down!"
They crouched to earth, Polly being the only one who knew any reason for doing so.

"Someone's about, close at hand," she breathed as they made group amongst the heather. "A man, I think."

"Not that Mike?" whispered Betty tensely.

The madcap shook her head.

"Don't think so, girls. I saw him—too big, I think."

"Figures look bigger by night," Betty remarked under her breath. "It may be that Mike chap, unable to find his way to the Round House."

Not even the faintest of whispers followed this. Polly was raising a warning finger again as she knelt up to peer around her warily.

After a minute she ducked low again, whispering:

"It's a man. He's gone on, the way we were going."

"To the Round House!" said Betty. "A man! That makes three of them then. The boy Mike, the Emily person, and now a man."

"Unless," whispered Polly, getting up to steal on again, "Emily is only a sham name for a man. If he's the man who robbed the school—But we mustn't breathe, girls."

They had gone perhaps another two hundred yards across the misty wilderness when their ears picked up the mumble-mumble of a gruff voice.

At first they supposed that it was the man speaking to the boy Mike, now that those two had encountered each other, and that the conversation would be continued. To Betty and Polly this was an exciting belief; but Dolly felt sick at heart again.

Then it became apparent that the man had turned back from the way he had been going, and as for any talk, it was always his surly, grumbling voice that came to the crouching girls. He seemed to have turned back the moment he met somebody, taking that person with him.

Sure enough the first audible mumble was in this strain:

"You'll come along back with me, and no more of it. Bringing me out Morcove way again, when you know very well the risk. Want to get me had-up, do you? Supposing I got seen?"

There was silence after that, except for the faint swish caused by some striding through the heather and dying bracken.

Soon even that faint sound died away, and the four girls were as if they had the whole moon to themselves.

Polly spoke excitedly.
"Who was with him, do you think? Was it the boy Mike?"

"I wonder!" muttered Betty. "One thing is certain, anyhow. That's the thief. That's the man who robbed Morcove School."

"Oh, but I'm sure the boy couldn't have had anything to do with it," Dolly said quickly.

Then she flushed as Betty and Polly looked at her in astonishment.

"Why, Dolly? How on earth—"
Desperately Dolly tried to compose herself.

"Well, you know what I mean. It seems horrid to think of a young boy like that—"

"I don't know so much," broke in Polly.

"After all, Dolly, we've got to think of the hospital. It was a dirty trick. Well, anyway," she added with her grim smile, "we don't seem to be doing any good here. The only thing now, I expect, is to go home and play Halma."

She laughed softly, but next moment added bitterly:

"Not that we seem to have done any good at all. If it hadn't been for you, Dolly," she went on reproachfully. "Fancy leading us the wrong way like that!" And Polly's voice was cross now.

"I'm—well, I couldn't help it, Polly," Dolly murmured, and again the colour flooded to her cheeks. "But, you see—you see—"

"Well, I'm afraid I don't see," said Polly shortly, and they walked on in silence.

Aunt Ada Is Angry!

A POKE to the fire when they got back to the cottage and there was instantly a cheery blaze.

"I'm going to get you girls some supper," Dolly Delane quietly remarked, pulling open a dresser drawer to get the cloth out. "But you must leave it to me."

"It's likely!" cried Betty blithely. "Come on, Polly, and don't be a cross-patch any longer!"

"Oh, of course, I'm a cat," the madcap stigmatised herself, while she held the lamp for Dolly who was at the dresser. "Have I been saying very horrid things, Dolly?"

Very."

And homely Dolly, as she swooped the white cloth over the table met the madcap's eyes and smiled lovingly—too lovingly for Polly. As usual, Polly in her tantrums had been saying things she now regretted.

"I'd better not have any supper as punishment," sighed Polly. "I'll wait and have some of Naomer's cocoa—cold."

"That will be punishment," chuckled Betty.

"Howwible!"

"But I deserve it."

"You don't, Polly," exclaimed Dolly, and there was that dimple again. "You girls were perfectly entitled to follow up the mystery that it is, and I went and spoiled it. Would you like some of my coffee hot?"

"I would!" cried Polly.

"Wouldn't you, girls?"

"Yes, Dolly, please."

"Gwateful and comfowting, yes, wather!"

"There are some cold sausages

."

"Which I wawmly wecommend, geals."

"Cold apple-tart and cream," Dolly carried on the menu. "A jelly—oh, there's a junket!"

"Great! We shan't be fit for school in the morning."

"Never mind, we'll chance it," said Betty. "We shall be well

again by the afternoon, which is a halfer; that's the main thing."

So Dolly, whilst captain and madcap alike helped where they could, soon put out the best of everything from the larder. Those cold sausages, lovely and white when you cut them, went down well with a spot of apple sauce. The cold apple-tart was cleaned right out of its large dish by the girls.

"Bai Jove, I'm as hungry as a huntah!" was the elegant one's surprised comment.

"We've been doing so much," Polly could not resist twitting Dolly roguishly. "Did you make this junket, Dolly?"

"Yes, why?"

"It's delish."

Presently the kettle boiled, and then Dolly jumped up from table to make the coffee. The cosy sitting-room suddenly reeked with the most refreshing aroma.

"And if you girls like to have it round the fire," suggested the homely one, as she passed the steaming cups, "or would you rather stay here? And can't somebody finish that jelly?"

"I can't," said Polly. "I wish I could. Oh, this coffee! And to think I've been nagging you, Dolly. I'd better go back to the school."

"Oh, no, you're quite forgiven now," smiled Dolly. "What about a little dance to finish up such a jolly evening?"

"Bai Jove!" beamed Paula. "That's bettah, what! There are times, geals, when it's wather fun—great fun, in fact, to be heah! Can I lend a hand?"

Polly was already enthusiastically pushing the



"And who may you be, my boy?" demanded the police sergeant. "Me? I'm Gee-arge!" came the lad's answer. But Betty and Polly in the background were thinking: "You're not George; you're Mike!"

table from the centre of the room to the wall.

"No, thank you, pettums," she answered now. "The strain of dancing will be sufficient tax on your elfin form. And we can't have you collapsing in the middle of 'Life is Just a Bowl of Cherries,' or one of us won't have a partner. See?"

"Thanks, Polly," Paula beamed again. "How thoughtful you are to-night, bai Jove!"

Dolly had gone to a cupboard to fetch the portable gramophone, and Betty was staggering across the little room with the records.

"None of them very up-to-date," said Dolly. "But they're not bad."

"Ready, everybody?" demanded Polly, winding furiously at the gramophone.

"Yes, wather!" said Paula amiably, rising from her chair and moving towards Betty.

"A gay foxtrot, just to wake Paula up," laughed Polly, as the music started and she grasped Dolly boisterously round the waist.

Gaily the girls danced, thoroughly enjoying themselves. Betty sang the words of the song, while Polly made noises of her own now and again, which she insisted improved the rhythm.

"Let's see if we can reverse, Paula," Betty was saying above the din in the little sitting-room. Bravely Paula tried. There came a roar of laughter from Dolly and Betty, while Polly still carried on singing. Paula's efforts at reversing were really amusing, and Betty wasn't the best of instructresses; she was so helpless with mirth herself.

So merry indeed were all of them that not one of the chums heard the clack of the outer door opening straight into the living-room.

Until suddenly there was Aunt Ada, taking in the whole scene, with a disapproving, angry gleam in her eye.

"Wha-a-at!" Aunt Ada fairly yelled. "Dancing! And ball-room—modern foxtrotting, at that!"

Four girls stood stock-still.

"Why, auntie!" said Dolly dimpling. "Can I partner you?"

But just then the gramophone screeched. Dolly rushed to lift the arm and turned to face Aunt Ada.

That lady now was giving scandalised eyes to the dresser, where the girls had placed the supper things for the time being.

"Those sausages—gone! That apple-tart, finished. The jelly—the junket—"

"Well, auntie, I had to offer the girls some supper."

"Dolly, that is more of your impudence. Clear away those dishes instantly. And then to bed. You two girls," rounding upon Betty and Polly, "your things on at once. The car is outside, waiting. It is a nice thing!" Aunt Ada stormed on. "Here I come home unbetimes, on account of something that has happened at the school."

"Something happened at the school?" the girls all echoed as with one voice. "Why, what—what?"

"Another robbery!" was the sensational answer from Aunt Ada, whilst she removed her velvet wrap and tossed it aside. "And this time, jewels."

"Jewels?"

"Gweat goodness!"

"Miss Somerfield's jewels—taken from her room. We were at dinner together, when one of the maids came rushing in to say that the head-mistresses' jewel-case was gone from the dressing-

table upstairs. Then they found that the thief had entered by a landing window."

"Good gwacious!" Paula palpitated, whilst the others mutely stared.

"But there, it has nothing to do with you girls," Aunt Ada wound up, maintaining a furious tone. "Be off, the pair of you, this instant!"

"Good-night then, Dolly—Paula," said Betty. She and Polly were hastily putting on outdoor things that were close to hand. "See you in the morning. Miss Addison—"

"Not a word!" that lady said, holding up a hand. "I shall say no more about this, except to the headmistress. Be gone."

This command was too much for the pair to whom it was addressed. They bolted out of the cottage, each struggling to conceal a big grin.

But it was no time for Dolly to indulge in secret mirth as she scurried away to the scullery with some of the supper things; but if ever her mind had been smitten with anxiety on account of that lad whom she knew to be the very soul of chivalry, it was now.

Not a moment, whilst she kept up the fun with her chums before Aunt Ada's untimely bursting in upon them, but what Dolly had been in secret anguish.

Was it Mike whom that man had encountered upon the moor and bidden him so roughly to "come along home"? That was what Dolly was in great suspense about.

Had Mike fallen into the hands of that ruffianly man?

She could find out very likely—if only she could slip away to one of the outbuildings. But how to do that, now that Aunt Ada was back and in such a bad temper again! Oh, and there had been another robbery at the school!

Suddenly Dolly had the wit to exclaim:

"I must catch those two before they go!"

"Stay, Dolly. You don't need to—"

"I must, auntie!"

And out ran Dolly by the front door, showily carrying a school book with her, as if it needed most urgently to be handed to Betty or Polly.

She reached the wicket just as the car was going off, and in the darkness neither of its schoolgirl passengers noticed her. Very likely they were in convulsions of laughter over Aunt Ada. It did not matter; was all the better for Dolly's purpose.

Away went the car, speeding back to Morcove School, and she could flash round and then dart to the yard behind the cottage. She had pulled the front door shut when she ran out.

All the pent-up agitation of the last hour or so was having free course as she breathlessly reached a certain shed and softly lifted the latch.

"Mike?" she panted softly. "Are you back, Mike?"

"Yes, Dolly, here I am!"

The answering whisper in the darkness left her with a relieved mind and heart.

"Oh, Mike," she panted on, whilst he rustled out of some loose straw that must have been covering him, "how thankful I am! You—you weren't caught by that man then?"

"Man? What man?" he queried.

"Why, you didn't know then?" Dolly gasped in relief.

"No; where was he?"

"Out on the moor; I was with several girls who had made up their minds to be at the Round House at eight, but I—I managed to keep them away. Suddenly we heard a man go by,

speaking roughly to someone. It was as if he had caught someone who belonged to him, and was compelling whoever it was to go home with him. I was afraid it was you, Mike."

As she ended, still short of breath, she realised that the boy seemed to be stricken by her words. He had been cheery, confident until she mentioned that man.

"Well," she clamoured. "I must go in, Mike. Oh, I don't want to make it worse with auntie! But—"

"You want me to tell you who the man is?" Mike said huskily.

"Not—not if you don't feel free to do so, Mike. I know there is a lot you dare not explain. And I trust you, feeling sure that you are doing your best for someone else. I had your word about that, Mike."

He cleared his voice before saying tremulously: "There can't be another girl like you, Dolly, for being a pal to a chap. Fancy managing to

on the moor like you. Oh," she exclaimed as her mind jumped to the terrible conclusion, "it was Emily! It was Emily—your sister."

"It must have been," Mike answered huskily. "And now I feel—oh, I'm just about desperate! Listen, Dolly. I told you that other time that Emily who wrote the note that your chums saw is my sister. Now I'm simply bound to explain a bit more. Emily has been out of our lives—I mean the lives of us at home, for three years. She made a reckless marriage, and—"

"Sh!"

Dolly had heard the back door of the cottage opening. Her aunt's voice screamed:

"Where is the girl? Dolly, Dolly, come in this instant! Do you hear me, girl?"

Morcove's day scholar put out her hand to Mike in the darkness, touching his in friendship and sympathy. Not so much as a whisper passed. She took up an empty pail and rattled and clanged it as she stepped out into the dark yard.



After Betty's message, Miss Everard simply could not help making a joke for the Form to enjoy. "Polly Linton," she called. "You're wanted by the police!"

keep those others away from the Round House after all. I was in a stew, for you had warned me, and yet I had to be there."

"Yes," she nodded quickly. "And did you meet Emily?"

"I did. And there it is, Dolly; that's all I can say. As for that man—what do the other girls think about him?"

"They think he is the man who robbed the school."

"Yes, well," muttered Mike, "so he is."

It may have been only a moment, but it seemed to Dolly Delane that she stared aghast at this mysterious boy for a full minute.

"It's the plain truth, Dolly. I'd give anything to be able to call that man honest. But he isn't."

"Then the worry and misery of it all to you means that you are connected with him."

"In a way, I am."

"But," Dolly reasoned on in a deep whisper, "it was not you he was taking home, although it was somebody who had been out and about

"But where have you been? Why must you always be dodging in and out!" railed Aunt Ada. "When you know there's been another robbery at the school, which means a bad character still about."

"Oh, we shan't have any bad character hanging about this place, auntie!" laughed Dolly. "What is there to make off with?"

The Mistake They Made.

"HALLO, you two! Back again!" Naomer sat on her bed in the Fourth Form dormitory, hugging pyjama-clad knees.

"Yes, here we are! Back again, as you so intelligently remark," said Polly gaily. "Good-evening, Naomer, good-evening, all."

Helen Craig, Pam Willoughby, Madge Minden, Biddy Loveland and one or two others were gathered by Paula Creel's empty bed near Naomer.

They greeted Betty and Polly now excitedly,

all anxious to know how what they had discovered in their search.

"Well," answered Betty, "we should have done more, only"—and a frown crossed her face—"well—"

She paused, and stooped to peel off long, black stockings.

"It was Dolly's fault," broke in impetuous Polly. "I honestly can't understand her. It seemed as if she led us in the wrong direction on purpose. She—"

"Oh, you mustn't say that!" said Betty. "But really, girls, she is behaving awfully strangely. She insisted that she knew the moor better than we did, and landed us right in the wrong direction. Result: we weren't on the spot—at that Round House—at eight."

"Oh, what rotten luck!" sympathised Helen Craig.

"Yes, well, it's not like Dolly."

"I'm afraid I should have been rather peeved," came from Tess Trelawney in her own outspoken way.

"As a matter of fact, I was," said Polly candidly. "And she didn't seem to mind, either. Didn't apologise or anything for taking us the wrong way."

"Never mind," Betty now interposed tactfully. "We had a very jolly time at the cottage. Dolly gave us a delicious supper. Then we had a little dance, when in stalked Aunt Ada!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" pealed the chums. "What a shame!"

"Bekas, serve you right for being ze 'greedy zings!" chimed in Naomer.

Then Betty spoke again as soon as the laughter had died down.

"Miss Addison told us about the other robbery," she said seriously.

"Yes, Miss Somerfield's jewels."

"Much more serious than my gold coins, or even the collection money," said Pam. "I wonder if 'Mike the Mysterious' will return the jewels as he did my coins."

"Hope so," said Helen Craig, moving off to her bed. "But, Betty, you didn't tell us if you found out anything at all to-night. Surely you didn't go all that way for nothing?"

"Oh, no. I'd forgotten for the moment," Betty answered seriously. "And now, of course, since we know about Miss Somerfield's jewels, what we heard may be important."

"Why, who did you see, Betty?"

"We saw no one. But we did hear a man," said Betty softly. "He was mumbling and grumbling at someone he was taking home, and it's our idea that that man is the thief."

"Really!" was the excited chorus.

"Yes," said Polly. "For we heard enough to be quite sure that he is in fear of the police. Perhaps he had committed this fresh robbery at the school just before he passed by us on the moor."

"And you didn't know who it was with him?"

"It was our mysterious Mike, for a cert," said Betty. "It's as plain as daylight, girls. The man is the thief; Mike is his son perhaps—anyhow, they're connected. Mike's straight, and that's why he did his best to get the gold coins returned. Saw where the man buried them, and then let us know."

"That all fits in beautifully," remarked Tess tersely. "Question is, what's the next thing?"

"To do? Let Miss Somerfield know as much as we know, that's all!" was the captain's downright

answer. "Since we know more about the actual thief than anyone else, it's up to us. Otherwise, the robberies might go on for ever."

"And my sixpenny pearls the next loss," said the madeap. "Remind me to get them insured, someone."

"But look here, Betty," cried Biddy. "How are you going to make it known about that man on the moor, without saying that you and Polly were there?"

"We shall say we were there, that's all."

"What ze diggings! Bekas, zere will be a regular Barney's bull, Betty, eef you—"

"Can't help that," shrugged the captain.

"And how about Mike?" asked Madge uneasily. "He did us that good turn. We don't want him to go to prison."

"He won't," was Betty's confident response. "It'll all come out that he was against the robberies."

"How I wish," sighed Polly, "that we could have got in touch with Mike. It looks as if he must be a lad to be sorry for. Well, we shall know him on sight if ever we do see him, after seeing him at the Round House the other evening at dusk."

"And he didn't see us," rejoined Betty gladly. "But let's get into bed now. I must prepare for my ordeal with Miss Somerfield before breakfast to-morrow. Good-night, Polly. Good-night, all."

"Good-night."

Wanted by the Police!

CALLED out of class next morning, Betty Barton found that she was wanted—by the police.

But they were not going to take her up. They only wanted to see if she could tell them a little more than she had told Miss Somerfield early this morning about the man on the moor.

Morcove's headmistress was present during the interrogation, and Betty was secretly amused to see how that lady was trying to appear still very displeased over last evening's escapade, whereas in her heart she was—well, inclined to excuse the whole business.

"This girl and her companions at the time should not have done as they did," the headmistress made a point of remarking to the police at the close of the interview. "But two of them were hardly under my care at the time, and, I suppose, in any case, one must allow for mistaken zeal."

"My opinion, ma'am," said the fatherly-looking sergeant, "girls will be girls, just as boys will be boys. I've got four of each, and I know."

"I have had hundreds of girls through my hands," returned Miss Somerfield blandly, "and I agree. Do you want this girl any more? If not, she should return to her class."

"Well, ma'am, if she could be spared, and one of the others, say, just to go along and show us whereabouts on the moor it was—"

"Betty, do that," Miss Somerfield quickly nodded. "It had better be Polly to go with you. Dolly and Paula have to go home to the cottage at midday."

So Betty sped back to the Fourth Form classroom, and with all her class-mates looking up from their work, wondering at her excited smile, she asked Miss Everard to let off Polly at once, stating the reason why.

The temptation to make a joke for the whole class to enjoy was too much for Miss Everard, who loved to hear a general laugh.

"Polly Linton, you are wanted by the police."

Up rose Polly, her mouth in a round O.

"I am? Why?"

"Ooo, gorjus, and serve you right, Polly!" exploded Naomer. "You won't get nice sausages in prison, I know."

Then the Form-mistress rather wished she had not allowed the class to relax. Such a shout of laughter there was. The merriment was still continuing when Polly got outside the class-room with the captain.

"Goodness, what's up now, Betty?"

"Oh, nothing. We've only got to show the police whereabouts it was last evening. There they come, ready to go with us."

The fatherly sergeant and his burly constable were all kindly geniality towards the two girls on the way out to the moor.

"If you can just show us where to start looking, young ladies, mebbe," said the sergeant, "we can pick up some tracks. There's not much doubt the man you heard, as he went by in the darkness, had just done that fresh burglary at the school. Pity you never seen him. That would have been a real help, that would."

"Not but what we shall get him in the end," broke in the constable, expanding his chest as he stepped along. "Through the boy, most likely."

"Through the——"

"The boy Mike, as he signed hisself in that there note talling you young ladies where the gold coins would be dug up. Ah, and it's still a mystery to me," said the sergeant, "why he sent that note to one of you scholars instead of to our local headquarters. The super is suspicious about that. The boy'll have summat to answer for there, anyhow."

"Oh, but that's not fair!" broke out Betty. "After all, the boy was doing his best, in a— a very awkward situation, surely."

"He can't be up to much," was the sergeant's opinion. "It's the super's belief that the note was sent to you girls, to get you to go on the quiet like, and dig up the coins; but you'd have found the boy there—the man as well, mebbe—and there you'd ha' been, trapped."

"Trapped?" gasped Polly incredulously. "How do you mean?"

"Made to fork out all the cash you had upon you afore you were given the coins. They'd have both have kidded you that they'd had a deal of trouble and risk, and must be rewarded, and so—"

"Oh, I can't believe that!" cried Betty indignantly. "That's too absurd!"

"It's what the super thinks, miss."

"But it's silly. The boy is honest——"

"I should doubt it myself, miss."

"He only sent the note to us at the school because a girl in our Form owns the stolen coins. If I had known that you were going to doubt that boy's honesty," Betty added in an upset tone, "I'd never have described what little we have seen of him."

"Neither would I," said Polly quite hoily. "Do you mean you would arrest him if you found him?"

"That I do, young ladies, most certainly. Like father, like son, for a cert. He meant some little trick of his own, sending you girls that note, only it didn't come off."

There was silence after that. A state of tension had come about suddenly between the police and Morcove's "detectives." Betty looked worried.

She had been compelled to give Miss Somerfield the best description she could of the mysterious boy Mike and had not minded doing so after all, as he seemed to be secretly on the side of law and order. But the police were taking a different, cynical opinion.

So they all got to the spot which the two girls could identify as being where the man had gone by them overnight, never suspecting their presence in the ground-growth.

For awhile the two officers of the law sauntered and poked about with no result. Then the sergeant proposed an adjournment to the Delanes' cottage.

"You're going there?" exclaimed Betty. "Why?"

"Well, miss," and the sergeant smoothed his moustache, "we know that the thief made use of one of the outbuildings the night after the first robbery. Besides, the girl that belongs to that there cottage, ay, and the one staying with her for company—they was with you two last night out here?"

"They'll hardly be back from school yet."

"We can wait for them, missy. Mebbe, you'd like to come that way, too?"

Betty and Polly were not quite sure. They had to remember Aunt Ada and her indignation over their quite natural fun last evening. But they resolved to chance another skirmish with the Terror, wanting to see Dolly and Paula as soon as possible.

They had shared last night's adventure on the moor, and would be eager to know if there had been any developments this morning.

From a mile away came the ding-dong of Morcove's midday chimes as the Study 12 pair, with the sergeant and his constable, reached the old thatched cottage by a back way in from the moor.

Treading a path that went through a small orchard they got to the back premises—all the livestock and store-sheds that were ranged about the small yard—without meeting a sign of life. The sergeant, of course, was making for the cottage itself to announce his important arrival to Aunt Ada.

But coming to the back door first they found it locked, and a knock produced no answer from within.

"Huh, nobody at home seemingly!" was the sergeant's deduction. "But we might try the front."

He moved on, the others following, to go round to the front porch, but suddenly he and the others heard somebody coming as if to see who had been knocking at the back door.

A boy of little more than school age he was, garden fork in hand. When he saw two officers of the law and two Morcove scholars he stopped dead.

"Hallo; my lad!" cried the sergeant with gruff amiability. "Is the lady about?"

"No; she's gone into Barncombe shopping. The place is locked up."

"Ah! Shopping, is she? And what may you be doing, my lad?"

"I'm a-working about the place for Miss Add'son," said the boy in yokel style. "The old man they always have, he be laid by with rheumatics."

"Old Dan'l. I see." And the sergeant smoothed his moustache again. "And who may you be, then, my lad?"

"Me? I'm Geearge."

But Betty and Polly were thinking:
"You are not. You are Mike!"

Who Is This Boy?

A GREAT shock had gone through the two Study 12 girls.

It was Mike—their "Mike the Mysterious," the boy glimpsed once by them in the dusk at the old Round House on the moor. The self-same boy who had posted that note to Study 12, saying where Pam's stolen gold coins could be dug up, by which note they had obtained his name—Mike.

He was here, working for Miss Addison, and he called himself George.

Betty and Polly longed to be able to turn to each other, to exchange amazed looks. They dared not do so. The appalling thought was common to both girls: "Supposing the police get to know."

It was the one clear thought perhaps, existing in minds that were suddenly chaotic.

"Well, George, my lad," said the sergeant, "we don't want to keep you off your work. Miss Addison won't thank us for doing that, I'll allow."

"That she won't," laughed the boy. "Miss Addison, she be a fair nigger-driver, she be. Why! I couldn't do in a month wot she reckons me to do in a da-a-y. Livestock, an' all!"

"It won't kill you, my lad," remarked the sergeant with a patronising look on his beefy face. "I always say nothing like hard work myself. So we'll get along," he added to his constable, "and report to the super. Nothing more to be done here, I'll allow."

"Good-morning," Betty wished them both.

"Oh, good-morning, young ladies! You staying on?"

"We shall wait for our two chums to get home from the school."

The officers of the law trudged away, whilst the boy "Geeerge" strode back to his bit of digging. But Betty and Polly, there were as if rooted to the earth.

A reflective silence; then—

"Polly, do you know what I'm thinking."

"Yes, I do, Betty. She has known all along—Dolly has."

"And that's why, last evening, she did her best to keep us away from the old Round House. She has been befriending this boy, and—"

"Look, Betty, here they come, home from school."

The heads of Dolly and Paula could be seen over the roadside hedge as those two girls came pedalling along from Morcove. Dolly was well in front of Paula.

There came a nudge for Betty from Polly, but Betty whispered an excited:

"Wait! We don't want to give Dolly a nasty turn," the Form-captain added softly. "Just a bit, Polly."

So they both remained out of sight to both day scholars, one of whom was already alighting.

"Well, George," captain and madcap heard Dolly hail the outdoor hand, "is Miss Addison back yet?"

"Not yet, miss."

"She isn't? Oh, hooray! You might leave that digging and go along to the calf-pen. I'll be out in a minute to—"

To talk to him in secret, evidently. That was the inference Betty and Polly were drawing, and suddenly they met each other's eyes and smiled.

"Now," said Betty blithely, "come on, Polly." And out they strolled, confronting Dolly and the boy on a pathway beside the cottage.

Poor Dolly! In spite of her schoolmates' best attempts to show reassuring looks she became horrified.

It was Paula Creel, floating upon the scene a few moments later, who saw nothing at all disconcerting in the presence of Betty and Polly. Paula only wondered why the outdoor "hand" was standing there, as if to take part in some coming talk.

"Bai Jove, geals," chuckled the beloved duffer, "so the police didn't awwest you, after all. Haw, haw, haw!"

"No," said the madcap. "Nor did they arrest Mike."

A queer little sound, half-sigh, half-moan, came from Dolly, causing Betty to exclaim:

"Oh, but it's all right, both of you! At least, it's all right at present. You're George, aren't you?" she smiled at the boy. "I mean to Miss Addison and the police."

"I'm Michael George," he said in a gentlemanly voice. "Christened so. If I like to be called Mike by—friends and George by—others; any harm in that?"

"None whatever," said Polly sweetly. "And we hope we may make it Mike. As being—friends."

He smiled delightedly.

"Bai Jove!" Paula now gasped. "Er—Mike. But—er—wasn't theak' a Mike who—Howwows!" as the dreadful truth struck her. "I mean to say, bai Jove, this is 'Mike the Mysterious,' yes, wather!"

"Oh, dear!" saighed Dolly. "Oh, and look—look out, all! Here comes Aunt Ada!"

"What—where? Gosh!" said Polly.

"Howwows! Geals, geals—"

"Out of this, Polly, you and I!" was Betty's urgent advice.

And next second they were darting away, aware of Michael George's hasty return to his digging, whilst Dolly and Paula walked down to the wicket-gate to fetch in their bicycles and at the same time meet the Terror.

They Will Because They Must!

BETTY and Polly stopped and looked back after fitting a couple of hundred yards.

"Did she see us?"

"No."

"Pouf! It was the thing to do—beat it," Betty laughed breathlessly.

"Bother her, I say!" fumed the madcap. "I'd have given anything for a long talk with Dolly."

"So would I. Isn't it the limit, Polly? I do believe she's known all about this boy, ever since the first robbery."

Polly's first response was a chuckle.

"Lucky day girl. There she is, able to do anything she likes, and nothing to fear."

Going on again briskly back to the school, the pair of them laughed a good deal more. Then the graver aspects of the whole affair made all the talk for the rest of the way.

They were now that same anxiety which Dolly had experienced for several days and nights on account of Mike. He must not fall into the hands of the police. Yet there he was at the cottage, working about the place, when a description of "Mike the Mysterious" had been given to the police.

"Phew, it is a marvel that sergeant didn't suspect just now!" breathed Betty.

"It isn't a marvel; it is the perfectly natural thing for any policeman to do," Polly stated flatly.

"Still," Betty sighed, "if only I had never described the boy to Miss Somerfield, so that she described him to the police. I say, Polly."

"Well?"

"That boy can't possibly be the son of that ruffian we heard mumbling away on the moor last night."

"No, Betty; we were wrong there."

"So the police aren't the only ones who make stumers," grinned Betty. "But there must be some connection between that boy and the man."

"Yep," Polly agreed crisply. "Mike is sort of implicated."

"Oh, dear, I don't like that word!" said Betty. "It sounds too much like getting blamed for what others have done."

On the point of re-entering the school grounds she looked back once more. The cottage was still in sight.

"I was just wondering, Polly, whether perhaps the sergeant had suddenly turned back—thinking."

"Sergeants don't think," said the madcap. "They go home to dinner, and that's what he's done."

"Well, after all, it's what we've done, too, Polly."

"We're different," claimed the madcap. "Even Sherlock Holmes had to have something to eat sometimes."

"It must be nice to be a Sherlock Holmes," mused Betty, "and not have to go into afternoon school. Oh, but I'm forgetting! It's Saturday—a halfer."

"But there's a hockey match," grimaced Polly. "Almost as bad."

"We want to see Dolly for a talk," settled Betty. "We must know. And besides, we must warn her, so that she can warn him; the police, only this morning, have been given a description, worse luck!"

"Yes, dash it!" agreed Polly.

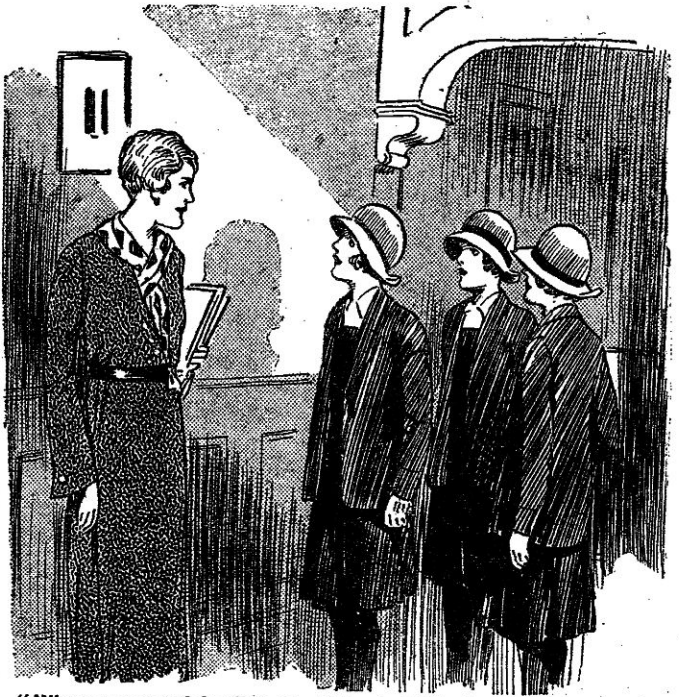
"Well, come on," laughed Betty. "The sooner we get dinner over the better."

She and Polly, inevitably, were mobbed by other juniors on the way to the dining-hall. The Form was greatly excited over two of its members being called upon to assist the police. Had the police got their man yet?

"No," said Polly grimly. "But they've got theories, and they're all wrong."

The Form smiled, inferring that Polly's "mood" was attributable to her having been snubbed by that sergeant. It little guessed the real reason why both madcap and captain had returned, looking so bothered.

How the pair of them hurried out at the rise from dinner, hoping that Dolly would be across by now from the cottage. And instead, it was only Paula who presently turned up.



"Where are you girls off to now?" asked Miss Somerfield sternly. "Oh, we were just going to see Paula home." Betty answered, but she did not tell the Headmistress of their other urgent reason for going out!

"Where's Dolly then?" clamoured Polly feverishly. "What's she doing now?"

"Er, I wather fancy washing-up, geals."

"But—"

"But I have a message for you," continued the elegant one, and she assumed a great air of secrecy. "Dolly can't get across to the playing-field; her aunt is on the wampage again. And—er—that boy—"

"Yes, what about the boy?"

"He has weivered his wages and has—weall, I pwesume he has got the Saturday afternoon off, yes, wather!"

"And the message?" Betty pleaded feverishly.

"Will you meet Dolly at the Round House as soon as possible after the match? She says wait for her if she's not theah. Her aunt is on the wregular wamp—"

"So you said before," stamped Polly. "Let's rush and get that match over."

* * * * *

"And it's only a quarter-past three now," rejoiced Polly, as she and Betty flung aside their hockey-sticks indoors after a very stiff tussle with the Fifth, resulting in a draw.

"We'll manage," smiled the captain.

By twenty-past they were out of doors again, going with only one or two others over the rough moorland. It had been seemed best that there should not be too big a crowd, and only Madge, Pam and Paula were accompanying Betty and Polly.

They made a detour amongst the screening heather and gorse—another shrewd precaution.

Nor did they omit to do the last few hundred yards in very wary fashion, zig-zagging along

silently and stooping low whenever the surrounding growth was not so high as their heads.

Over the great waste of undulating ground, rather dreary-looking under a dull sky, came the faint ding-dong of Morcove's chimes, as the five girls closed in upon the lonesome, ancient building in its half-ruinous state.

They were so sure that they had crept upon it in perfect silence, when they found nobody awaiting them they wondered if Dolly, or Mike, or both perhaps, were lying low, pending some tell-tale sound.

At last Betty gave a low, bird-like whistle.

It had no effect.

"Sh, Dolly!" one of the other ventured to call softly. "You there, Dolly?"

There was no response.

"Mike!" voiced Betty just as guardedly.

Still no answer.

Then inevitably uneasiness seized the waiting girls. The afternoon was getting on. Had something happened that Dolly, at any rate, was not here? It was she who had made the appointment.

Suddenly they heard someone coming in haste through the heather from the direction of the cottage. Dolly at last!

"Here, Dolly!" whispered Betty, crouching with the others a stone's-throw from the ivied Round House.

Then Morcove's day girl got to them with a final breathless scamper.

"Pouf! Had such a job to slip away," she panted. "As it is, I don't know what Aunt Ada will think of me."

"Bai Jove, Dolly, she'll be disinhewiting you after all!" said Paula.

"Don't care if she does," laughed Dolly. "More important things than money. Girls, thanks for turning up. I've been dying to know—have the police been given any description of that boy?"

"I'm afraid they have, Dolly," Betty answered ruefully. "It had to come out when I was explaining things to Miss Somerfield, and, of course, she passed on the information. But don't look like that."

Dolly's face had turned pale and grave.

"But it makes matters all so much worse," she exclaimed distressfully. "It couldn't be helped, I know. You girls had no idea that—that Mike is what he is."

"What is he, Dolly?" clamoured Polly.

"He has given me permission to tell you, so I can do so now," the day girl whispered. "Before, I was sort of on my honour not to breathe a word. Besides, I hardly knew anything myself about him then. But he has confided the whole thing to me now."

"Then you must have been as puzzled as we are at this moment," commented Pam.

"Puzzled!" echoed Dolly. "Oh, I have had a time, I tell you. But, anyhow, one way and another I've been able to help him."

"To keep out of the hands of the police?"

"Oh, more than that," Betty was answered in a deep whisper. "The poor fellow, when I first found him hiding on our place, was living like a tramp, all for the sake of something he wanted to do—for someone else's sake."

"Oh, is that it!"

"Yes. I'll try to put the whole thing in a nutshell," Dolly whispered on to her eager listeners.

"Mike has two sisters—one, the elder of the two, at home, where she keeps house, for their parents

are dead. The younger sister—not much more than twenty-two—made a rash marriage. It was a case of being infatuated with a man who turned out to be an utter scamp. He's gone from bad to worse; but Emily—that's his wife, the sister of Mike's that I'm speaking of—"

"Yes."

"She won't leave him."

"Geez, what a twagedy."

"Awful!" murmured one or two of the others.

"But go on, Dolly."

"It's been a terrible anxiety to Mike's elder sister, as he found out only a short while ago. Then he made up his mind; only a youngster though he is, he'd see what he could do. It came to this in the end, he had to get in touch with Emily in secret. She wanted to remain out of his and his other sister's lives, feeling that she had made a mess of her own life. But Mike formed a desperate plan, and he has been carrying it out. Only there have been these robberies at the school—"

"By Emily's husband?" jerked out Betty.

"Yes."

Dolly's affirmative came with a most sorrowful nod.

"The man has taken to robbery now. At one time he was a mere adventurer, cheating and swindling. He was very handsome in those days, Mike says."

"Bai Jove, an uttah saoundwel!"

"And that's the man Mike's sister is tied to now," Dolly went on emotionally. "And Mike, in his honest, boyish way, is trying so hard, is hoping desperately to make all right in the end for both his sisters. But these robberies—"

"One moment, Dolly," broke in Polly. "When we heard the man growling at somebody out here on the moor last evening, it was his young wife Emily?"

Dolly nodded.

"Emily had made an appointment at this lonely spot to meet her brother Mike. You remember the note to him that you found by hunting about here. Brother and sister were talking, here at the Round House, when the man turned up and ordered his wife to go home with him."

A heavy silence fell upon the girls. They were having thoughts too deep for words.

"Mike is coming here," Dolly suddenly whispered. "I thought he would have been here by now, girls. He was given the afternoon off, this being Saturday."

"And what becomes of him over the week-end?" queried Betty anxiously.

"I shall be in touch with him," was Dolly's low response. "He must be very careful not to be seen by the police. They didn't suspect him this morning, but they may at any moment."

Betty and Polly thought of the sergeant's words: "Getting the man through the boy."

"Mike has to be back at the cottage towards dark," Dolly added. "Auntie asked him to come in then as there are jobs that must be done, although it's Saturday. The same to-morrow. The livestock—"

"Oh, yes, we understand," nodded Madge. "And just as well he will be close at hand."

"It is," agreed the day girl fervently. "I can go on helping him. But I hope he comes now. The sooner he knows that the police were given a description of him the better."

Betty sighed aloud.

"If only I had never described him."

"That can't be helped," insisted Dolly. "And Mike will never be the one to blame you."

"Sh!"

Polly had thrown up a finger.

"Is that Mike coming now?" she whispered. "It's someone."

They listened intently, hearing for a few moments only the swish and rustle caused by a movement amongst the thick heather and the dying bracken.

Then there came a voice, familiar to at least some of the excited girls.

"The police!" breathed Polly. "Oh, that's that blessed sergeant once again!"

A Crisis!

AND now, what were the girls to do? It was a choice between trying to creep away unseen and of simply confronting the police in the most innocent-looking way.

Swiftly enough the girls reached the conclusion: Far better to show themselves. Talk with the officers of the law would result, and talk would serve as a warning to Mike, if he were on the way here, to "beat it." By speaking loudly a very timely warning could be conveyed.

So in a moment or two all six girls rose up, with an innocent air of having come this way during the Saturday "halfer" out of idle curiosity.

The beefy sergeant and his constable were wading through the heather towards the Round House.

"Hallo, young ladies, you agen!" cried the sergeant. "You haven't seen nothing of that there boy George this afternoon?"

"George?"

"Ay! The boy that's been took on to work about the place, over yonder at the cottage. You, miss"—to Dolly—"must know the boy I mean."

Dolly knew, right enough. So did they all, of course. The sergeant meant Mike.

"Miss Addison, she says she paid him at mid-day and gave him the afternoon off. He was to return a little after five, but I doubt if he will," said the sergeant.

"Why?" asked Dolly, outwardly calm.

"For the simple reason he must know this part of the world is getting too hot for him. But we shall have him," exulted the sergeant. "And so we shall get the pair of 'em!"

He laughed.

"Pleasant surprise for the lad, if he do return to the cottage, bimeby. I've got a constable there, waiting for him."

He looked at Dolly with a grin.

"Should you be out and about with these friends of yours, miss? Your aunt is playing steam about you, she is. My advice, you get home sharp. By the way, any reason for you all being here?"

"We've been talking about the robberies, and all that," said Betty.

"Well, young ladies, if I was you I should clear out of here. Don't you ever play no games?"

"Oh, yes," said Betty. "We have played a match this afternoon."

The sergeant for once was abashed. All the same, the girls felt it to be highly advisable to part company with him and his constable.

Dolly was even now giving her chums a meaning look in farewell, and they understood. She was going back to the cottage at once, in the

desperate, frantic hope of being able to stand between the police and poor Mike.

But was there anything she could do? Or must she only see him, in due course, walk back and so walk into a trap?

For their part Betty and those who must return to the school for tea were already resolved to put off that return for as long as possible.

"Scatter," counselled Betty, as soon as they had become out of sight to the two officers of the law. "That's the best thing we can do, girls; spread around in the hope of meeting Mike."

"One of us may fall in with him," nodded Polly. "He was to come to the Round House, se Dolly said."

"Good job he hasn't," said Pam under her breath. "Only think what it will mean if he falls into the hands of the police. The extra misery for both his sisters, on top of all the rest."

"Yes," murmured Madge sadly. "Mike could perhaps clear himself; but he would still be detained—publicly involved in it all."

"Bai Jove, haow I feel for him, geals!" sighed Paula. "He must be a weal wipper to have undertaken so much. Apawt from the way he has had to wough it, the whole effowt is most pwise-worthy, what?"

"Splendid!" said the others.

The next half-hour was one of desperate scouting around on the moor, keeping out of sight of the police, and yet ever keeping an eye on the alert for Mike, if he should show up.

The chums were at as great distance as possible from one another, half ringing round the picturesque ruin.

He did not come, and at last they knew they must return to the school.

Whether to be glad or sorry that he had not shown up, they could not decide. He might have fallen into the hands of the police before they could warn him to get away again. On the other hand, he was still going on—unwarned. And the hour was at hand for him to return to the cottage.

"We can't go on, not knowing what's happening," frowned Betty. "We'll have to come out again presently, although we simply mustn't be out late. Miss Somerfield won't stand any more of it."

"I know," said Polly brightly. "Paula has come back with us for tea in study. We'll see her home to the cottage afterwards."

"Bai Jove!"

"That's the idea!" beamed Betty. "There can be no objection to that."

They were passing in off the moor to be in bounds again, and they looked back anxiously. Nothing, however, was to be seen that could lessen that anxiety. In the poor light of the late winter's afternoon they could dimly see the cottage roof, and that was all.

Indoors they paused at a landing window, half-way upstairs, to peer out. Now they could see a good expanse of the moor—all that lay between the school and the Round House. But the scene was dim with the bluish mist that was preceding the early twilight.

Were the police still ranging about on yonder? Was Mike there? Was he yet warned—or not?

They could not tell, and it was with reluctant steps they went on up to Study 12. Hard to do all that the case demanded, when there had to be a certain observance of school routine.

"Well, is tea ready?" Polly began at Naomer

stormily. "Paula wants to get away back to the cottage."

"Eet is all ready, so she can have it and be off as queek as she likes, and I hope it will be fine for her," said the dusky one. "But I didn't know she was as fond of Dolly's Aunt Ada as all that."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"To be perfectly candid, I am not," said the elegant one, relapsing into her old favourite arm-chair. "The prospect of spending this week-end undah the same woof with that dweadful hawwidan, geals, fills me with—"

"Fill yourself with this, Paula darling," suggested Polly, coming across with the first cup of tea poured out by Betty. "Er—you don't want much to eat, do you? None of us do."

"What ze diggings, don't we! Bekas I—"

"You! We're not talking about you, Naomer. Some of us have to go out again to see Paula home."

"Leaving me to wash up, is zat is? But I don't mind," cried Naomer boldly. "Only you are in and out like ze dog in ze fair."

"Tea!" cried Betty, and a start was made.

No need to say which way the talk turned during the next few minutes. There were those present who, as members of the Study 12 coterie, had to be told everything in connection with Mike.

But there could be no time for comment. There came a lively: "Now!" from Betty, which caused Paula to rise up eagerly enough from her easy chair, ready to be off.

Downstairs went the captain, Polly and one or two more, with the chum who was at present sleeping at the cottage.

The schoolhouse was quiet below stairs. Scholars had mostly come in and were lingering over sociable teas in the various studies, where much hilarity prevailed. The chums thought they were going to slip off quite nicely, having left word in Study 12 that they would be back, after seeing Paula "home."

Suddenly, however, there came the arresting cry:

"You girls! Where are you off to now?"

And that was the very headmistress, advancing towards them as she spoken, when another moment would have seen the anxious girls safely off and away.

The Signal!

"WELL? You, Betty—answer!"
"Oh—er—we were going to see Paula home to the cottage, Miss Somerfield. She has been having tea with us upstairs."

"It is quite right for Paula not to go back alone; but I am going that way in the car immediately, and so I can drop her at the cottage gate."

"But—"

"Polly, I don't like that 'but.' You girls must stay indoors now. It is not lock-up time, we know, but they have not caught that man who has twice robbed the school, and he may be in the district still. Go and get your things off," was the final command which caused their hearts to sink lower than ever. "Paula, remain, and in a minute you can go with me."

"Er—thanks, thanks! Er—extwemely good of you, Miss Somerfield," Paula managed to beam. "Er—I may see you in the mawning, geals."

Those last words—they only added to the other girl's dejection. Polly, always a bad one at brooking disappointment, looked as black as

thunder whilst going away with Betty and the rest, leaving Paula alone in the front hall.

"Gosh, it's awful!" fumed the madcap. "We may see Paula in the morning with Dolly, and we may not!"

"Aunt Ada will come to our school service with them both, for a cert," Betty took comfort in thinking. "We shall know then, girls."

"That's no good!" stamped Polly. "We want to know to-night. How are we to sleep if we don't know? Think of that boy, and even now he may have simply walked into the hands of the police."

Next second she was bringing her hands together with a little clap.

"Gee, but I've got it! Wait a moment, girls."

Flashing round on the stairs she ran down to the ground floor again. Paula was still alone, near the front door, snicking with her hair as there was to be a ride in a car with the headmistress.

"Paula—sh, listen!" whispered Polly hastily. "If it's all right, you or Dolly signal to us after dark."

"Er—signal? Bai Jove—er—"

"Lamp at your bed-room window, or hers; show it three times, if it's all right," the madcap instructed staring Paula. "That is, if Mike is still safe from the police, see?"

"Yes, wather! Bai Jove, I quite undewstand. Polly deah! I wealise you geals will be wowing—"

"H'm!" coughed Polly, for she heard the headmistress coming. "Ta-ta, Paula, for the present."

And the madcap chased upstairs again, overtaking her chums on the Fourth Form landing.

"We shall know, girls."

"We shall?"

"Yep. By signal from the cottage. So now, all we have got to do—all we can do—is to wait."

"You're the one, Polly," sparkled Betty. "Splendid idea!"

Down the Fourth Form corridor they scampered, back into Study 12, where Polly, leading, burst in and caught Naomer licking jam off a large spoon.

"Shoo, you! Is that what you call washing up?"

"No, bekas—"

"Just look at this jampot now!" cried the madcap. "Remembering what was in it five minutes ago."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Many hands soon made light work of the clearing away, and then Study 12, as Betty remarked, looked quite businesslike again. As they could not hope for any signal yet books were spread out and some of the evening work tackled there and then, those girls who did not actually belong to the study going away to do their own work elsewhere.

Dark night came on, and then Study 12 filled up again.

The time had come. Now they could expect to get the signal from the cottage, away yonder in the darkness.

Crowding at the window they waited and watched. Any signal, other than three passes of a lamp across one of the cottage windows over there, would mean that the worst had happened. But if—if all was well—

"Ah, look!"

"Ooc, yes, bekas—zere it is, ze first flash!"

It was hardly a flash, but Naomer's meaning

was that in the slow fashion of a lighthouse light an upper window at the cottage had shown lamp-light.

It died away—came again. Second "flash." Would there be a third? If so—

"Yes, look, girls—look! Oh, hooray!" Polly burst out joyfully. "Three flashes!"

"And no more," murmured one of the others. "Only the three!"

"Then it's all right!"

"Gorjus! Bekas—"

"They haven't caught him yet, girls! Hip, hip!" the captain joined in all the jubilation.

"And that's everything."

"Dolly must have warned him," Helen rejoiced. "Good old Dolly!"

"Can't you imagine her joy!" chuckled Polly. "She's been standing by him all along."

"I zink we better cellerbrate!" said Naomer, ending a caper round the study. "Bekas, we have triumphed."

"We?" demurred Polly, and there promptly developed one of those little dust-ups between madcap and imp, which were a feature of life in Study 12. But it was all fun, arising from heartfelt joy over Mike's safety.

That night Betty & Co. went to bed happy. They were going to get a good sleep after all, waking to a Sabbath morning that would very likely bring Dolly and Paula to the morning service for the school with Aunt Ada.

It did so, and although the two girls and their grim escort arrived only just in time for the start the chums hoped to get word with Dolly and Paula after service.

But Aunt Ada had notions about the Sabbath, and she marched Dolly and Paula straight home to the cottage, denying them a moment with their schoolmates.

"Ugh!" raged Polly afterwards. "That woman!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's all right, though," smiled Betty soothingly. "We have last evening's signal to rely upon."

"And yet," exclaimed Madge uneasily, "I rather thought Dolly looked worried."

"Yes, well," said Pam optimistically, "there is still a certain amount of anxiety for Dolly, even though Mike is safe."

"We might walk across to the cottage this afternoon," suggested Betty. "Surely Aunt Ada—"

"Aunt Ada can be dodged," said the madcap.

But Betty & Co. were saved the trouble of a skirmish with the Terror later in the day, for suddenly, half an hour after dinner at the school, in burst Dolly upon them all in Study 12.

"Dolly!" they greeted her with one great shout. "Oh!"

"Bekas, we were just coming—"

"I've slipped across, simply had to!" panted Dolly, as if she had run all the way from the cottage. "Oh, I felt I must come and tell you!"

"Why, what, Dolly—what?"

They saw her looking as if she were trying not to cry.

"Mike," she whispered; "he's vanished!"

"What!"

"I gave you girls the signal last evening, just after dark, because it was all right then. He had not been taken up by the police. The policeman at the cottage went away soon after. I thought you girls had warned Mike to keep away—"

"But we didn't warn him!" put in Betty unhappily. "We didn't see anything of him."

"And I," Dolly almost moaned—"I have seen nothing of him since yesterday dinner-time. He should have come back to pass the night in one of the sheds, as he has been doing night after night. But he didn't come back last night."

"He didn't!"

"I slipped out last night with some supper for him. He was not there. He was not there this morning, either. He's vanished!" Dolly repeated in great distress. "Gone! We don't know where."

"Are you sure he hasn't been taken up by the police?"

"Positive!" Dolly answered Betty. "They were at the cottage again, only an hour ago, asking if we'd seen anything of him. No, he hasn't fallen into their hands, but, oh, I am beginning to fear something even worse!"

"Why, what?" clamoured several. "What could be worse than that?"

And the answer came from Dolly tensely:

"This, girls; if—if he has fallen into the hands of that man."

There was silence in the study then.

In those last words from Dolly her chums had instantly recognised a possibility fraught with the very greatest danger to the boy whom they had all befriended, such a plucky, noble-minded fellow as he was.

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

WILL MORCOVE WIN THROUGH?



Order your

SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN—2D.

right away

A parcel the pretty young woman hands the Chums and then—she vanishes?

Who can she be?

What can the parcel contain?

Why is she so secretive?

There are many other thrills in the long Morcove school story that appears next week, by

Marjorie Stanton.