

“ WILL MORCOVE WIN THROUGH ? ” See the Thrilling School Story Within

The SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN 2^d



THEY MUST REACH MIKE!

Betty & Co. to the rescue in the exciting, long complete Morcove tale—inside.

The Last Round in the Amazing Battle of Wits, Featuring Betty and Co., of Morcove School.

WILL MORCOVE WIN THROUGH?



Brave Dolly Delane! Though appearances are against him, she still trusts Mike, the boy she has befriended! And in spite of her stern aunt, Dolly means to do her best for him. Not even Dolly's chums, Betty and Co., know what a hard fight it has been for the homely day-girl, but with their help, Dolly's triumph is to be able to right a great wrong, and bring happiness to others as well as to Mike himself!

By Marjorie Stanton

at Morcove
MY French primer. Seen it, anybody?"
 "My fountain-pen. Anybody seen—"
 "Ah, bah, where is everything?"
 Bekas—"

"Oh, how I hate Monday morning!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Not a single thing to be found. And in two minutes, school."
 "Ze trouble is, you never put anything in ze right place."
 "What about you?"

And madcap Polly Linton glared at that dusky co-tenant of Study 12 who was Morcove's royal scholar, popularly known as her Royal Impishness, Naomer.

"You never put anything away, Naomer—except food."

"Go it!" chuckled Form-captain Betty Barton, in the midst of her own scurry round for books that must be taken into class.

"After to-day," shrilled Naomer, "I will make ze change. No more Study 12 for me. I am fed-up."

"After the breakfast you ate, I should think so."

"Coming?" asked Betty, after laughing again at Polly's way with the dusky one. "There goes the bell. Yes, Pam"—as Pam Wiltoughby and several others showed themselves in the study doorway, books under arm—"we are ready."

"Are we!" groaned Polly. "Out of my way, Naomer."

"I must just—"

"Get away from that corner cupboard. Shoo,

you!" shouted the madcap, driving off Naomer, but not before the latter had obtained an apple to go into class with.

"I'm off!" Betty gaily announced. "I want to catch Dolly and Paula for a word before school."

As no one could be more anxious than was Polly Linton to get a few words at once with those two chums who were attending school as day girls she now fled into a kind of frenzy of haste.

Blotting-pads and books and papers were all in the air at once; chairs went over—crash! and then Polly whirled forth into the Fourth Form corridor.

A snatched-up, random collection was under her arm. She supposed she had got everything she would want for this morning's routine. If not—never mind.

"Hey, Betty—all of you!"

With this breathless cry Polly caused her chums to wait for her as she tore up the corridor, now alive with other girls, all in a state of fluster.

"It's that Naomer," seethed Polly, going downstairs with a highly-amused batch of chums. They knew very well that Polly would be as miserable as snow in harvest without Naomer in Study 12.

"We can't say it's Paula Creol's doing, anyhow," laughed Betty. "The study has been no tidier since Paula went to stay at the Delanes'

cottage to be company for Dolly while Mr. and Mrs. Delane are away."

"It's been a thousand times worse. But," said Polly grimly, "when all this excitement and suspense about the—the great mystery is over, then I'll take Naomer in hand properly."

"When!" said one of the others. "How I wish the whole business could be cleared up to-day."

Eagerness to get downstairs put a check upon further talk. A few seconds later the captain and her chums were mobbing across from the foot of the staircase to the big front door of Morcove's spacious schoolhouse.

Dolly and Paula were just coming in, after leaving their bicycles at the cycle-shed.

Their hurrying to the cloak-room to discard outdoor things supplied that opportunity for private talk which the hall did not permit. Betty and the rest, following the two day scholars to the coateps, were instantly asking:

"Anything fresh?"

"Nothing."

That was homely Dolly Delane, shaking her head while hanging up hat and coat.

"Mean to say not a word of news about Mike—where he is, or what's become of him?" was Betty's whisper.

"Nothing," Dolly repeated in a low tone. "Here it is, Monday morning, and it was last Saturday midday when he vanished."

She added quickly:

"I suppose there's nothing fresh at the school?"

"Nothing," the captain whispered back, whilst those who stood by looked serious. "Miss Somerfield hasn't heard anything more about her stolen jewels. She told us so, half an hour ago."

"They're gone for ever, I'm afraid," grimaced Polly. "The police won't do any good. That man who, we know, was the thief—he's too clever for them."

"And there's no Mike this time to get the stolen stuff back to the school as he did Pam's stolen coins," added Madge Minden softly.

Dolly Delane sighed.

"No, Mike has vanished. Oh, and it is a shame what people think, just because he's disappeared, after Aunt Ada had told him he was to go on in her employ at the cottage. She now believes, like the police, that he had something to do with the robberies. So he had, of course, but not in the way they imagine."

"Still missing," breathed Polly, frowning. "And, Dolly, do you still think he may have fallen into the hands of that man?"

"I do!" flashed Dolly. "I have told the police so this morning. I didn't tell them all I knew—all that you girls know as well—about Mike. That would never have done—"

"No! Oh, no!"

"But I did feel bound to stand up for Mike. I said that he was not a thief, and no willing associate of thieves, and that the sooner the rotter who is at the bottom of all the trouble is tracked down, the better."

"We must go in now," Betty murmured regretfully. "But I never felt less like school."

By their looks all her chums showed that that was their mood also.

Away to the Fourth Form class-room they trailed, there to seek their accustomed places under the eye of Miss Everard.

That good-natured mistress may have thought Betty & Co. were a little bit distraught this morning, but hardly more so than were other scholars. In any case, she was prepared to make

allowances. You could not have two robberies within a week at a school without the work suffering somewhat by such sensational happenings.

Unhappily, too, those robberies had not been cleared up. They had been traced for a certainty to the work of a man who, it was now suspected, had an accomplice in the person of a boy of mere school age—that same boy who had been given work by Aunt Ada at the Delanes' cottage.

But the man had yet to be found, and as for the boy, just when the police were wanting to question him last Saturday he, too, had vanished.

So Betty & Co. were by no means the only juniors to have a separate train of thought about all this whilst lessons went, on or to talk about it and nothing else during "break."

Only there was this big difference; the chums of Study 12 knew certain things about the boy Mike which no one else at Morcove knew at present. Things that the lad himself had relied upon their being silent about, even if he had not implored silence.

Dolly, and Paula who was staying with Dolly while Mr. and Mrs. Delane were away, were due back at the cottage for dinner, and so after the midday dismiss the others accompanied those two girls down to the gateway. The bicycles would be mounted there.

"I shall be so glad to get home to the cottage," exclaimed Dolly. "Somehow, I can't help hoping that at any moment I may find some clue which will convince me one way or the other."

There were understanding nods from her listeners.

"If—if he only went away suddenly last Saturday because he felt the police would take him up, then I'm sure," Dolly added fervently, "he would have done his best to let me know."

"You were a fine friend to him, Dolly," murmured Betty admiringly.

"I believed in him from the first; then I lost faith, and I'll never forgive myself for that," Dolly muttered. "Then I found out, better than ever, what a really fine lad he is, and even if I never see him again I'll always remember him as brave and fine-spirited."

They had all got to the great gateway by now, and she was ready to mount with Paula and ride off along the road that wound away to the town.

"Before," she added quietly, "he left a message for me in the calves' trough, where I'd be sure to find it. He may have left another note for me that I haven't found yet."

"Although you've searched?"

"Searched, Polly! I spent most of yesterday hunting around. But what I'm afraid of is," sighed Dolly, "that he never really intended to vanish. Something happened to him."

And there Dolly broke off, being suddenly aware of a stranger's approach, as if with the intention of speaking.

A woman she was—a young, attractive woman, who was coming towards all the girls now that they were just outside the school gateway.

This young woman had the appearance of being one of those City workers who were frequently to be found lodging in quaint old Barncombe, having been ordered away to the peace and quietude and wonderful air of the West Country by a doctor.

There was a tell-tale lack of spirits in the woman as she came up to the girls, asking:

"Morcove School?"

"Yes, this is Morcove," cried several of the chums.

"Could one of you give this to the headmistress, please."

Betty was indicated as being the one to entrust with any mission of that nature, and into her hands passed the small package which the stranger had carried.

She was turning away now with a smiling: "Be sure and let her have it, won't you?" And Betty, nodding and smiling in return, at once set off back to the schoolhouse. Polly and others went with her, for the two days girls had mounted and were pedalling for the cottage, a mile or so distant.

This was a bright morning for the lateness of the autumn, and so Betty promised to come out again as soon as she had performed the little errand. Meantime, Polly and the rest were going to get a bit of exercise on the field.

All by herself the Form-captain got to the door of the headmistress' sanctum and tapped.

"Come in."

"Please, Miss Somerfield, this has come for you."

Betty advanced into the big room, offering the package.

"What has come for me, Betty?" was the wondering remark. "For I'm not expecting anything."

"A—a young lady brought it, giving it to me at the gates," explained the junior. "I suppose she was tired and thought I might save her coming right up to the schoolhouse."

"I see. Then she has not waited?"

"Oh, no," Betty was answering, on the point of turning to quit the room, when—

"Good gracious!" gasped Miss Somerfield. "Stay, Betty. See what is in this parcel."

String and paper wrappings had been stripped away, revealing the contents—a leathern case with initials wrought in gold.

"My stolen jewels!" was the astounded cry from Morcove's headmistress.

After Her!

BETTY stood dumbstruck, her eyes dilating upon the beautiful leather-covered case that was balanced upon Miss Somerfield's right hand.

"Wait, Betty! Let me open it and— Ah, the lock has been broken! But they are all here—oh, look, everything is here!"

It was a cry of still greater delight from the headmistress now that her own dilating eyes were so quickly taking stock of the contents of the case.

A coiled rope of pearls, one or two diamond brooches and other lovely jewels—there they were, shimmering and sparkling as they lay snugly upon the silken lining.

"Oh!" Betty found her voice at last. "Miss Somerfield, how wonderful—and how pleased you must be!"

"Yes, Betty, yes. This is too good to be true, one feels inclined to say. But there they all are—the things I have so prized; presents, all of them, from dear relations and friends. But," spoke on the headmistress, whilst she agitatedly set down the case of jewels, "what does it mean? You received the package."

"From a young woman at the gates."

"And now she has gone!"

"She started to go away; but has she gone or can I rush and overtake her?" was Betty's excited cry.

She flew to the window, peering out, but in a moment that seemed to be only so much waste of time. Round she flashed, to find Miss Somerfield gesturing wildly.

"Yes, go after her, Betty. You and any of the others—run, run! We must know who that woman is. Find her. Fetch her back—"

"It won't be our fault if we don't!" was Betty's cry, as she sped away.

On the games-field were juniors who became agape at sight of the Fourth Form captain charging out of the schoolhouse to rush across to them with excitable cries.

"Polly—all of you! That young lady who gave me the parcel just now—"

"She's gone."

"I know. But we've got to find her!" panted Betty, as her chums came flocking towards her. "That parcel contained Miss Somerfield's stolen jewels."

"Wha-a-at!"

"And no explanation. So come on, all," cried the captain, dashing off again.

For just a second Betty's chums looked too



The contents of the parcel were revealed—a case with initials wrought in gold. "My stolen jewels—returned!" Miss Somerfield gasped.

? There's a wonderful surprise in store for all readers!

astounded for movement. Then they started to run after her down to the gateway. They overtook, and like hounds in full cry they emerged upon the open country road.

"See her?"
"No."

The roadway was deserted. There had been time for Dolly and Paula on their machines to ride out of sight; but the woman, if she had kept to the road, should have been still in sight, having to walk.

"Where is she, then? On the moor?" conjectured Polly.

"That's about it!" panted Betty. "Guessing that we would soon be after her."

"In other words, she's hiding?" exclaimed Helen Craig.

"Won't be easy to spot her, either," muttered Tess. "There's such good cover on the moor."

But off they raced, spreading into a kind of open order as they fared across the rough, undulating ground, covered with dense heather, brown bracken and gorse.

As quickly as possible the girls galloped over a big area of the big wilderness on the look-out at every eager step. But their quarry was never even glimpsed. At the end of a good half-hour the chums gave up the fruitless quest and came together again, warmed up and weary.

"Phew!"
"Pouf, yes! Bekas, I could do with ze refresher! I zink ze school ought to stand us one after that."

Betty looked bitterly disappointed.
"Shan't like going back beaten!" she grimaced.
"The woman must have flown the moment she was out of sight. In that case, of course, she might be a long way off by now."

"Pity!" muttered Madge. "For we've no need to wonder who she is."

"Mike's married sister," said Polly. "The wife of that man who committed the robberies, of course."

"And she has got the jewels away from her husband, just as she got back my gold coins," was Pam's quick rejoinder. "Only in this case she has had to return the stolen stuff by bringing it to the school herself."

For a few moments the girls stood reflective.

"I think I shall go across to the cottage," Betty suddenly announced. "It's only just over there, and it might be as well to inquire if they saw the woman pass."

"I would," one of the other approved this remark. "You and Polly, Betty, go across."

"It had better not be a crowd of us!" the captain smiled. "Aunt Ada will be there."

"And eet not as if she is ze one to offer you a refresher," said Naomer, producing an apple to bite at.

"You and I, Polly," suggested Betty, and off the pair of them went accordingly, whilst the others roamed homewards to the school, still keeping a look-out for the woman.

"Anyhow, Dolly," murmured Betty, as they neared the cottage, "Dolly and Paula will be glad to hear about the jewels being returned."

"If only we can avoid a skirmish with Aunt Ada," said the madcap. "You know, Betty, I don't fancy she likes me."

With last mirthful whispers the Study 12 pair reached a field gate that let them through from the moor on to land belonging to the Delanes.

Silently they trod towards the group of out-buildings at the back of the cottage, hoping to find Dolly there. Then there would be no need to go to the cottage itself.

Sure enough homely Dolly came whisking through the door of an old stable, pitchfork in hand, looking amazed at finding Betty and Polly there.

"Dolly!" whispered the captain. "I say, did you notice what became of that woman who handed me the parcel at the school gates?"

"No, I believe she went off across the moor. Why?"

"That parcel held Miss Somerfield's stolen jewels."

"It did!"

"And the woman herself must have been Mike's married sister," Polly supplemented in a deep whisper. "We've tried to find her but couldn't."

Dolly was turning deathly pale.

"Mike's married sister!" she breathed. "Oh! Oh, why—why didn't we guess at the time! If only we could have spoken to her, knowing who she was!"

"Yes," Betty nodded sadly. "I feel so sorry for her. The very way in which she has returned those jewels—it means she is terribly ashamed over all her husband has been doing."

"I've been having another hunt round," Dolly whispered, "to see if I could find any message left by Mike when he went away. There's nothing. And the police are still looking for him. They've been here again, auntie says, while Paula and I were at school. But here is auntie," broke off Dolly.

An irritable muttering was heralding the approach of her whom Study 12 had nicknamed the Terror. It was "Dolly, Dolly! Where is that girl now?" and then Aunt Ada founced upon the scene.

"Dolly, why must you be always— But what's this!" flared out the irascible lady, bringing hard eyes to bear upon Betty and Polly. "You, again!"

"Sorry, Miss Addison, but—"

"I have said I will not have you hanging around this place. Dolly has work to do if you have not. Be off, the pair of you!"

"But, Miss Addison, we thought you would like to know that—"

"I wish to be told nothing by you!" the lady cried at Betty hostilely. "My patience is tried beyond words. If it is not a lot of idle, impudent young girls like you, it's some nasty, imposing, dishonest boy, like the one who has—"

"Auntie, be careful what you say about Mike—I mean, George!" cried Dolly hotly.

Miss Addison bridled.

"Girl, what do you mean?"

"Simply that it's not fair to speak of him like that. He worked well for you; more than earned what money you gave him—"

"The boy was a sly young rascal, and the sooner the police get him, the better. And how dare you speak as if you would champion him."

"But so I would, auntie. I must!"

"Silence, Dolly! I never did! Go indoors this instant—go, I say! And you"—to Betty and Polly—"am I to speak again? Be off with you!"

"We're just going," said Betty. "Good-morning, Miss Addison."

Anything like a polite response was not to be expected. Aunt Ada was already striding after Dolly, as the latter, having stuck the pitchfork into the ground, made for indoors.

This Other Scene!

AT dusk that evening a tall, lithe, dark-clad man made his way with extreme caution over a certain part of the great moor, where it was mildest and loneliest.

Yet Morcove School was not so far away that its pleasant chimcs did not reach him in the hush of falling night.

Faintly the melodious ding-dong! came to him as he prowled across the darkening wastes, going between any shelter of hollies or other tall growth whenever possible.

The spot was one of the loneliest for miles around, and yet it was here that a fine country residence had been maintained long ago. The rambling, old-fashioned house was up for sale or to let, as one or two boards that hung over rank boundary hedges announced.

As Morcove knew, the place had been going to rack and ruin for many a year, and very likely scholars were right when they said that it stood no earthly chance of ever finding a tenant. It was not worth modernising, and in any case few people would have cared to be so "off the map."

A car could not get within a mile of the place. In the old days of pony-traps it had been a different matter altogether.

Proceeding ever warily and with much nervous glancing about, the man passed into the long, neglected grounds, working round to the back of the building.

Many a ground-floor window was broken, and he entered the doomed building by one of them. As he came foot-to-floor in a low-ceilinged, bare room he held himself very still, listening.

In the darkness that filled the old house there sounded the scuttling away of two or three rats; but after that there was utter silence.

Reassured, this man then stole through to the huge kitchen with its old stone sink and pump. He drew a enamelled cup from one of his pockets and raised enough water, working the pump-handle very quietly, to fill the utensil to the brim.

But the drinking water was not for himself, nor did he have the appearance of a common vagrant, seeking this derelict building for a night's shelter.

He was even well-dressed, and at one time there may have been extreme handsomeness in looks that were now marred by an expression of habitual cunning.

A KEY rasped in the rusty lock of a cellar door, and then came a sudden violent scuffle.

The man, entering this underground chamber, had been rushed at by someone upon whom the door had been kept locked these last two days and nights.

But it was only a brief struggle that took place between captor and captive there in the darkness. A man's superior strength over that of a mere boy's soon told, and he whom the Morcove chums had known as "Mike" was sent reeling backwards across the brick floor of the old wine cellar.

"See! That's all you get, my lad, for trying your tricks on me!" the man panted, keeping close to the half-open door. "And now you won't get a drink of fresh water for making me spill this."

The brimming mug had been dropped, by the



"Here, dear, have this," interposed Aunt Ada, gently, as she lifted the cup of tea to the poor young woman's lips. Dolly and Paula in the background were amazed. What a wonderful change had come over Aunt Ada suddenly!

man during his struggle to prevent the boy from dashing past him to freedom.

"I'm not going to use a light, even to look at you, either," the harsh remark was added. "Here you are; something to eat," as a package of food fell plop to the floor. "I can't help it if you go a bit hungry before I come again. You shouldn't have tried interfering, Master Michael my boy!"

"You'll be sorry for all this some day, Uncle Ralph."

"Will I?" was the laughed retort to the boy's furious utterance. "No sorrier than the family I married into. I'm thinking. Such a fine, honourable family," the man sneered. "But there should have been more money and less pride, for my liking."

"When I get out of here——"

"When, Master Michael. And what will you

do, then, eh, lad? Get me an extra dose of penal servitude for this, on top of the rest? And what about your sister then? How about the disgrace to the wonderful family then?"

With a heartless laugh the scoundrel picked up the mug and backed out of the cellar, remarking:

"Here, I'll get you a drink of water, after all. But no tricks, Michael lad. You wouldn't be where you are, if you and my wife hadn't been trying to double-cross me."

"That's a lie, Uncle Ralph."

"Is it? You'd been in touch with her, I know, or how was it that a trick message of mine, supposed to be from her, landed you plump in my grasp? And what about the gold coins? You had a hand in returning them to the school, you rascal. What have you been hanging about this district for, if not to hold secret meetings with your sister?"

He drew the cellar door shut, locked it, and felt his way in the deep darkness up the brick steps. Five minutes and he was back again with the replenished cup, which he set down just inside the boy's miserable prison.

"There you are, my lad, and so good-night again. As to how long you'll stay where you are," growled the ruthless man, "depends upon how soon I can get enough away to be safe."

Again he drew the door shut, turned the key, and groped upstairs.

Night had closed over the moor when he emerged into the open. Not a star shone; but the ground mist had yet to fall, a slight breeze delaying it. To the west the low-hanging clouds caught a faint glow from the lights of Barncombe town, and in that direction trudged the man.

It was a lengthy walk he had to make, and by the time the pavement was under his feet shops were closing for the night. He turned out of High Street into a dark by-way and was at home at last—if it could be called home.

His wife was here, tidy in herself and even then doing a few things to preserve respectability about this mean little abode which had been taken by him months back.

"Waste of time that," was his first word to her on striding into the shabby, lamplit room.

"We're off now, Emily."

She stood very still, looking at him.

"You mean, Ralph—"

"I mean, we're off up to London to-night," he said curtly, lighting a cigarette. "You'll have to walk to a station down the line, same as me, and get the train to Exeter from there. I don't feel inclined to stay around any longer in Barncombe. Besides, I want to find a man I know who will buy those jewels and no questions asked."

He laughed evilly.

"Sorry, Emily, but we must get a move on. Before the last penny of that collection money goes. So you had better get ready, whilst I—"

Saying no more he went from the room, and she seemed to stand as still as ever, listening to his movements about the shabby little house.

Suddenly she heard his voice a cry. He was

a few moments stamping and raging about an adjoining room, then he came rushing in to her, wild-eyed.

"The jewels!" he demanded furiously. "Where are they, Emily—where are they? For they're gone from where I was keeping them!"

"They are back in their rightful owner's hands, Ralph."

"What!" he raved. "You—"

"I have returned them to the headmistress, yes."

Although he looked at her as if ready to advance and strike her to the floor, she never flinched. For several moments there was this terrible silence between them. Then husky with rage he spoke again.

"Second time in a week that you've gone against me. The gold coins would never have been returned, but you got hold of them, you and that precious young brother of yours, between you."

"Keep him out of the talk, Ralph, please."

"I shall not!" he refused fiercely. "He's going to come into the talk very largely now. You've cheated me out of my haul—"

"I have restored stolen property, that's all."

"Very well; but it simply comes to this, my lady. Either you will get me enough money straight away to enable me to clear out, or else that brother of yours will suffer, see?"

She gave a violent start, and he smiled at this effect of his threat.

"That's the position now, Emily. If you think that brother of yours is still odd-jobbing about the cottage on the Barncombe road, you're mistaken. He's not. He's in my hands, see? I've got him—under lock and key."

The young wife swayed as these words came as blow upon blow.

"He kept an appointment once too often," the scoundrel laughed. "That bright young brother-in-law of mine; but he should have minded his own business. He should have been at school or out in the world getting a living."

"Ralph, where is he?" his wife pleaded hoarsely.

"You'll be told, when you've got me some ready money, not before. He's not so comfortable that you'd better lose any time, either. And mind, if I have to bolt off on account of the police with no money in my pockets, then I shan't be likely to leave word about what I've done with Michael. It might get me a few years extra."

She grasped the dreadful implication and went whiter than ever in the face.

"That's all I've to say to you," her heartless husband wound up, lighting a fresh cigarette. "Get me some money to-night, and I'll change my tune, Emily, not before."

Suddenly he added:

"What you had better do—get along to Morcove and try your hand at my game for once. Either the cottage or the school, just as you think best. You look just about pathetic enough," he laughed, "to be able to impose upon them somehow."

"I am not a thief, Ralph."

"No, but you married one," was his pitiless retort. "And even if you don't care for me any longer, as of course you don't, you care for that brother of yours, don't you? Well, then, for his sake, if not for mine, Emily, you had better hurry along and get me some money—to-night."

He sat down, smoking coolly. The man's baffled

! Watch these pages for
a thrilling announcement

rage had given place to a kind of fiendish composure.

After a moment his young wife passed from the shabby room, and as soon as she had put on outdoor things she went from the house, crying silently as hasty steps took her clear of the quiet old town and on to the lonely road to Morcove.

Dolly Has News!

IN Study 12 the co-tenants—at present only three—were hard at work upon prep.

Betty was finding the evening task as easy to tackle as usual. Polly was soon going to be able to close a primer with a triumphant slap and a cry of: "Finished!" From Naomer there came a counting-up whisper, as she grappled with a problem of "arith."

"Don't count out loud!" requested the madcap, by way of maintaining the harmony.

"I am not—"

"Yes, you are!"

"Soon you won't like me to breathe even!" protested the dusky one, dabbing a pen in the ink-pot. "Ah, bah, another blot!"

"What, has some ink gone on paper at last?" said Polly. "I thought you'd never be able to do anything except get it on your fingers."

Slap! She closed the text-book.

"I've finished, anyhow! And now—"

Hitching back her chair she jumped up and darted to the window, holding the blind aside to peer out.

"Mucky night, girls. Can't see any lights over at the cottage. I suppose they're all there?"

"Where should they be?" smiled Betty, using a blotter. "I don't think Aunt Ada is the one to say: 'Girls, on with your things, and we'll go into Barcombe, to the pictures.'"

Polly came away from the window, sighing.

"Poor old Dolly! Poor Paula! Fancy having to do prep under the eyes of that grumpy harridan!"

"Any old how, zey do get some supper. Paula said they even had stoo one night."

"Stoo 'l!" echoed the madcap. "When is Morcove going to teach you how to speak, Naomer?"

"When I get a shift to anuzzer study."

"Hear that, Betty?"

"Yes. The kid is getting cheeky, Polly."

"Much too cheeky."

"I am not going to be treated as I have been," the dusky one announced, closing an exercise with the problem in "arith" still unsolved. "I have come to ze conclusion zat I don't get ze square deal in this study."

"Hark, though," Polly warned.

It would have startled none of the girls to hear some schoolmate giving a responsive cry as she turned into the Fourth Form corridor, after running upstairs. But unless they were greatly mistaken, the voice that had called out: "Yes, Miss Somerfield!" was the voice of a girl who should not have been under Morcove's roof at present.

"Dolly!" jerked out Polly incredibly. "Surely—"

"That's Dolly right enough," asserted Betty, jumping up to dart to the door. "Yes! Hallo, Dolly!" she greeted the chum who was coming along from the stairs. "What on earth brings you here?"

"Goodness!" gasped Polly, also at Study 12's threshold. "Gee, something's happened then! But what, Dolly—what?"

Your Editor has a wonderful secret. Can you guess it?

"Yes, Dolly, you say—queek, queek!"

Those in the doorway backed clear of it, letting Morcove's day girl come rushing into the study, all out of breath and very excited.

"Oh, girls—"

"What, Dolly—what?"

"I—I had to run across from the cottage to see Miss Somerfield," panted Dolly. "She said I might go up to have a word with you. But I've got to go back with her at once."

"Miss Somerfield is going to the cottage?" cried Betty. "Why?"

Dolly steadied her breathing.

"You'd never guess what's happened now, girls. Half an hour ago there was a knock at the cottage door. I opened it, and who do you think was there?"

"Mike!"

"Wrong!" Dolly answered the madcap's quick guess. "But it was Mike's sister, Em'py."

"What!"

"Oh, and she was in such a state," Dolly continued distressfully. "She had been crying as she came along from the town, crying all the way; I should say. She was ready to drop. We had to help her indoors, and then she nearly fainted in the chair we gave her."

"But—but—"

"She was in a frightful state about Mike. Wanted to know when we last saw him, and if we had any idea as to what had become of him. But it was Miss Somerfield she wanted really; she was all for struggling on to the school, only Aunt Ada said 'No.' Then I just bolted off to fetch Miss Somerfield, and we're off back to the cottage at once."

"Gee!" gasped Polly. "I say. But can't Betty and I go back with you? We want to be in this. We—"

"It's no use, girls," exclaimed Dolly. "I did hint to Miss Somerfield, but she wouldn't hear of it. Now I must run downstairs again, for the car will be round—"

"You better have a refresher first, bekas—"

"But, Dolly," rushed on the madcap, "what on earth has brought Mike's married sister out to Morcove this evening?"

"Frantic anxiety on his account," was the tense answer. "It looks as if she's afraid to go to the police, and yet realised that something must be done. I must be off, really, girls."

"I suppose you must," Betty agreed. "Has Mike's sister some idea then, that—"

"The same idea that has been ours," Dolly broke in with a nod. "We were right. That scoundrel has got hold of him. Well, I shall see you in the morning."

She ran out of the study and up the corridor, refusing to stop for other girls who, aware of a fresh sensation, had come from their studies and were longing to question her.

Downstairs Dolly whirled, rejoining Miss Somerfield just as that lady's car, summoned from the garage, whined to a standstill outside the porch.

They drove away, the headmistress preserving a thoughtful silence during the very brief journey.

In the murky darkness of the late autumn night they came to the cottage, and Dolly, as she stepped after Miss Somerfield out of the car, could not help thinking: who would have guessed what tragedy was here!

So simply homely and happy-looking did the old thatched dwelling appear with a cosy light upon curtains drawn across lattic ewindows. But under this same humble roof to-night was one who had come to a crisis in her young life.

Paula admitted them to the lamplit sitting-room where Aunt Ada was all attention to the tragic visitor. And instantly Dolly sensed a tremendous change in her aunt.

The irritability, the sharpness of speech, the hard look—all were gone. This was an Aunt Ada who seemed to have acquired suddenly the gentle speech and soothing touch of a nurse.

"Ah, Miss Somerfield, it was good of you to come."

"Not at all, Miss Addison. So this is—*is* Emily."

"Emily Marchmont," Dolly's aunt supplemented softly.

"You were coming to me at the school, Mrs. Marchmont?"

"I—yes, I was on my way to you, but I knocked at this door, partly because I felt so—so done up, and because I thought there might be some reassuring word for me. But they can tell me nothing about my poor brother," the anguish-stricken woman almost moaned, "except that he has vanished."

"And you have not been to the police?"

"Ah, how could I? But the police will have to be told, of course," Emily Marchmont added with a sigh. "You will think me a coward, but—"

"Oh, no; we quite understand. As that man's wife—"

"Well, it is so," cried the poor soul, sweeping a hand across her forehead. "For good or ill, I married him, and how could I be the one to denounce him to the police? I have done my best, though—"

"We know you have," put in Miss Somerfield comfortingly. "You were instrumental in getting the stolen gold coins returned and then the jewels. I am grateful to you."

"Here, dear, have this," interposed Aunt Ada, in a tone that caused Dolly and Paula, in the background, to turn to each other astoundedly. "A cup of tea, nothing better when you're feeling so unstrung."

"Thank you, Miss Addison. You are very kind."

"I am not," dissented Aunt Ada. "I am a hard, hard woman. Or rather, I have been, although I hope to be different from this hour. Miss Somerfield—oh, and you two girls may as well be told, too! My eyes are suddenly opened to the wicked state I've been in these many years."

"Bai Jove!" gasped Paula, whilst Dolly voice an amazed:

"Auntie darling!"

"I have not known what an awful life mine might have been; have not known what a blessing in disguise it was when I was jilted years ago," Aunt Ada spoke on emotionally. "For it has just come out, whilst I have talked with this young woman here, that her husband—so much her senior as he is—was the scoundrel who threw me over."

"What!" gasped the two girls, along with their headmistress.

"It is certainly the case," Aunt Ada insisted tremulously. "The same man—Ralph Marchmont—jilted me years ago, after getting hold of a lot of my money. It turned me bitter at the time. I went away to live all alone in the Highlands of Scotland, and there like a fool—for I deserve no better name—I have been nursing my grievance. Instead of being happy at having escaped the far worse fate; the fate that has come to this poor young thing."

"Amazing!" said Miss Somerfield, finding her voice at last. "To think that you two should have met like this. But they always say it is a small world."

"Let what I have said suffice about that," pleaded Aunt Ada in a broken tone, "for we have matters of far, far more importance—urgent matters. That poor boy whom I employed—Dolly dear, you were right and I was wrong about him."

"Then that's all right, aunt darling."

"If only we knew where to find him," was Aunt Ada's rejoinder; and now Emily Marchmont looked up from her chair with returning agitation.

"But it appears that young Mike has been placed under lock and key somewhere by that scoundrel, and so, Miss Somerfield, what are we all to do?"

"The police again," said Morcove's headmistress decisively. "It cannot be kept from them. To spare Ralph Marchmont any longer is to doom that poor boy to some dreadful fate perhaps."

"Yes," agreed Emily Marchmont hoarsely. "And you know my wish. It must be Michael now, not my husband. Oh, if anything should happen to darling Michael—"

"It will not; it shall not!" broke in Miss Addison. "But listen, dear; you must stay here with me. The cottage shall sleep you to-night. It does me good to have you on my hands. I know how we can manage it, if Paula Creel can go back to school to sleep, that will give us the room she has occupied upstairs."

"Bai Jove," beamed Paula, "and I daresay you will be glad to get wid of me, Miss Addison!"

"No! No, Paula, I only wish you could remain, to let me make amends."

"Weally, that is extremely gwacious of you."

"Not at all, Paula. You and Dolly both, you have suffered badly at my hands. I have been forgetting what it is to be a girl. Now there's a dear, run upstairs and get your things, so that you can sleep to-night in your own old bed in the Fourth Form dormitory."

MEANTIME AT Morcove School the greatest excitement raged.

Study 12 was the hub of interest, for that study's three tenants had been the only girls to have word with Dolly Delane during her lightning visit.

Study 12 was packed to the walls. Study 12's doorway was thronged, so that Polly threatened to ring up for that police-sergeant to come along and control the crush.

In vain had Betty and the madcap said all that they could say. Girls simply would not disperse.

And Naomer, upholding the study's fame for hospitality, considered that refreshments should be supplied ad lib during this wait for further developments.

Altogether therefore there was a good deal of noise going on.



"Hello, here's Paula!" cried the occupants of Study 12 joyfully. "Yes, wather, bai Jove!" beamed the beloved duffer. "I have thwilling news for you, geals!"

"How you expect," dinned Polly, "a girl to work with all this row going on. What do you all want?"

Then, just when a fresh peal of laughter was starting, a dramatic diversion occurred.

Those hovering about the doorway were the first to realise—Paula was back, most unexpectedly. It was the surprised cry: "Oh, here's Paula!" that caused excitement to spread to those in the study.

"Paula?" yelled Polly incredulously. "She here?"

"Yes, wather, bai Jove!" beamed the beloved duffer, as way was made for her to float into the study. "Heah I am, geals, if I may find some wheak to sit down, bai Jove!"

"But—but why?" clamoured half the crowd. "Bekas she has run away from Aunt Ada; cowardly!" Naomer shouted. "Boo, afraid!"

"On the contwawy—"

"Yes, you are—boo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed some, whilst others, to keep up the joke, inquired:

"What's Dolly's Aunt Ada been doing to you this time, Paula?"

"Bai Jove, you'll be surprwised, geals."

And then the beaming one, with all her usual fluency, told of the dramatic change in Miss Addison and how it had come about.

With more than a score of astounded Form-mates for listeners Paula gave all the latest news from the cottage. She had come back to the school to sleep the night in her own old bed, as her room at the Delanes' place was required for Mike's sister.

But of Mike himself Paula could say not a word that would relieve the general anxiety.

It was the very reverse, for the fact that Mike was known to have been placed somewhere under lock and key by Ralph Marchmont took anxiety to a still greater height.

The scoundrel had boasted to his unhappy wife that he would not disclose the boy's whereabouts until he himself was safely out of the way. So

there was tremendous peril to Mike at the present time; a peril that might possibly be ended by the lightning arrest of Ralph Marchmont, this very evening.

"But supposing the rotter gives the police the slip?" girls said to one another as they pondered the situation. "What happens to Mike then?"

"There'll have to be a hunt for him," Polly exclaimed in her downright way. "It should be starting now, this very minute."

"No mistake, it's a frightful risk, depending upon the man's arrest," muttered Betty. "He's as artful as a fox, we know."

"Poor Mike," murmured Madge. "He has had a rough time, and all because he would do his best for others."

The juniors began to drift away then in twos and threes.

The evening wore at an end without further news or developments. Prayers, Miss Somerfield conducted as usual in Big Hall, and so it was obvious that she, too, had had to resume her normal routine, leaving the affairs in the hands of the police.

She made no announcement before dismissing the school for the night, nor could girls glean much from their respective Form-mistresses.

Miss Everard could only tell her charges that the police had been notified a couple of hours ago, and that Marchmont's arrest should have taken place by now.

But had it? If it had, then why had not word come to the school, relieving this great anxiety. The whole thing could be put in a nutshell now. As soon as Marchmont was arrested he might be expected to say where Mike could be found, if only for the sake of making things less serious for himself at an ultimate trial.

But until the arrest was brought off—poor Mike, perhaps shut away somewhere, suffering hunger and other privations, not even visited by his captor.

So Morcove was saying in the dormitories that night. Many a girl drifted to one of the

windows before getting into bed, and peered out anxiously.

The night, raw cold and pitch-dark, and that poor lad—where was he?

Morning came, and with it news.

Ralph Marchmont had not been arrested. Instead, he had been killed stone dead in a moment whilst trying to evade arrest.

Morcove's girls acquired the whole sensational story as soon as they were down from the dormitories.

It appeared that Marchmont had become alarmed for himself before ever the police turned up at his dwelling in the town.

He had bolted from Barncombe, and from what happened later it was obvious that, whilst getting a ride behind on a car going towards Exeter, he had either dropped off on his own accord when nearing that city or had been jolted off. They had found him on the highway, broken and lifeless.

The mis-spent life ended as suddenly, as unexpectedly as that.

It meant that Mike's sister was free; but Mike, her brother, was not. And the whereabouts of that ill-fated lad formed one more of the many dark secrets which Ralph Marchmont had taken with him.

A Clue—A Clue!

"O H, Betty, how I wish—"

"I know, Polly; so do I!"

"Then can't we?" clamoured headstrong Polly, now that school was over for the day. "Can't we do something instead of waiting, leaving the police to do—nothing?"

Betty looked across the study table at her best chum.

"Bit prejudiced against the police, aren't you, Polly?"

"They don't seem to be doing much. Although, I suppose, it's their best. But, Betty—"

"You'd prefer to do everything yourself?" the Form-captain caught up Polly, with a knowing smile. "Go out now, for instance—"

"And not come back until I had found Mike—yes. If I had to stay out all night."

Betty, receiving this in silence, sauntered to the window. She stood there, pondering for a full minute.

"The rotten thing for us, Polly, is the time of year. If it were summer, with long evenings—"

"Yes, dash it! But, Betty, can't we?"

"You wait here, will you, Polly?" came the captain's sudden mysterious request. "And keep any of the others, if they look in. I—I shan't be long gone."

Polly's face could light up now. She could tell. As captain, Betty was going to live up one again to the old slogan: "We'll manage."

Not more than a minute had Betty been gone when Paula Creel drifted in, with books brought up from the class-room.

"No news yet, they say, Polly deah."

"I don't want to be reminded."

"But don't be cross."

"I'm not cross, Paula, darling. I'm only—Ugh! I just can't bear the idea of sitting down to tea presently as if everything's all right, when we still don't know about Mike."

"Tewwible!" sighed Paula.

Then Naomer came in, and behind her were Pam and Madge and all those other juniors

whose custom it was to drift to Study 12 towards tea-time.

"Where's Betty?"

"She's gone to—well, to arrange about something." Polly was answering, looking very keyed-up, when they heard the captain's returning step in the passage.

Next second Betty whirled in upon them all.

"Girls, I've got permish for all of us to go across to the cottage. That's better than sitting about—"

"Gee, I should say so!" cried the madcap. "It's a start, anyhow."

"Start?" said Betty, pretending to look puzzled. But she knew what was in Polly's mind right enough. Only what had been in her own when she went off just now to plead for leave to go across to the cottage. Something. Betty could never have suggested what it might be, but something might transpire, providing a clue.

"I'm to give a message when we get there, from Miss Somerfield herself," the captain remarked, as they all swarmed downstairs. "Dolly went home to the cottage so quickly after school Miss Somerfield didn't catch her."

"The geal," said Paula, "is such a mawvel for being industwious, yes, wather! Bai Jove, to stay with Dolly is to realise what one geal can do in the way of housework and looking after livestock, and all the west!"

Bicycles made short work of the little jaunt beyond bounds, and the chums got to the cottage before Dolly had given a thought to tea. They saw her as they dismounted at the wicket-gate, busy about the yard, with an old overall to keep herself from being splashed by pigwash.

Some of them ran to speak with her, tactfully making it possible for Betty and one or two more to have first word with Aunt Ada and Mike's sister.

"Come in, my dears."

Thus the captain and those few others were welcomed at the trellis porch by that same lady whom they had nicknamed the Terror. The same—and yet how changed!

To-day there was all sweet cheerfulness about Miss Addison.

"The headmistress thought you would not mind our looking across," said Betty, "especially as there was a message she wished Mrs. Marchmont to have."

"I am all the more glad to see you, my dears, as that poor young thing has been saying, she would so like to speak with you who are Dolly's chums, and like Dolly, had such faith in Mike. You'll find Mrs. Marchmont inside."

The one who was now a widow although so young rose from a fireside chair as the scholars stepped into the cosy, dim sitting-room. Bravely she put on a smile, but as long as any of them lived they would remember the tragic sorrow that haunted her wan face.

Betty gave the message. Miss Somerfield would be sending across the car to fetch "Emily" across to the school, where it was possible to have any news without a moment's delay. The police could ring up the school at any moment, but not the cottage, as the Delanes were without the telephone.

"How thoughtful and kind that is of your headmistress," Mike's sister exclaimed. "But you have all been terribly good."

"Miss Somerfield is a wonderful woman, and Morcove a most admirable school," Aunt Ada burst forth, contrary to all her fault findings of

a day or two ago. "And I have been telling Dolly; I pay all her fees in future. I am sure her parents find it a pinch. In any case, I think Dolly wonderful, too."

Polly felt a roughish desire to ask: "And Paula?" It was possible that in her changed state of mind and heart Aunt Ada was even prepared to concede great merits in the Form's beloved duffer. But this was no time for levity, and the madcap forebore.

"You must all stay to tea and do your best to cheer us up, as I am sure you will," chatted on Aunt Ada most amiably. "Emily my dear, you're not to move. Some of these girls will help lay the table—"

"Yes, bekas, we have often been here to tea, and we know where everything is kept," piped in Naomer. "Zank you very much for having us, Miss Addison, and anuzzer time you must come to tea in Study 12."

"Delighted, I am sure, my dear. When all this sad, sad business is over—ended happily, so far as poor Mike is concerned, as we must hope it will be. So let Dolly and the others come in now; that Dolly, she was no sooner home from school than she was busy out there in the yard."

It was Polly who ran out to find Dolly and those who had joined her in the yard.

"No more, Dolly, this side of teatime, anyhow," the madcap said with a fond smile, as she joined them all. "You are all to come in to tea, Aunt Ada says. Oh, and Dolly"—in a deep whisper—"what a change in her!"

"She's a dear, and I do love her now," the day girl nodded simply. "And we could be wonderfully happy if only we knew Mike was safe."

She set down an empty pail, and whilst taking off her overall, gazed around the yard.

"See that old jacket hanging up over there on a nail beneath the thatch; it's an old jacket of dad's that I gave him to wear for the dirtier work."

Dolly was stepping slowly towards the open-fronted shed as she spoke, as if drawn to the shabby old garment simply because it had been worn once or twice by Mike. She took it down.

"Almost the last time I spoke with him, last Saturday, he was changing out of this jacket into his other, because Aunt Ada had told him he could have the afternoon off—"

Abruptly Dolly had stopped speaking, observing a folded paper projecting half an inch from the breast-pocket as she turned the coat about.

Her chums did not speak, but something of Dolly's curiosity and agitation was transmitted to them. They felt that she was thinking: "Now, what's this paper? There were no papers or letters of dad's in the old jacket when I gave it to Mike."

After a moment she took out the paper, unfolded it, and glanced at the writing at bore.

From where they stood the others could easily see that it was a womanish writing.

Then they saw Dolly turn as pale as a ghost. "What's this!" she gasped, visibly trembling, so that the paper shook in her hand. "A note from his sister Emily? But how can that be? Look, girls—just read!"

Instantly they were all giving excited eyes to the paper, which bore this message:

"I am leaving this for you at the old Round House, but we must not meet there any more, for Ralph knows, and it is not safe.

"There is an empty house further out on the

Watch these pages for exciting news!

moor. I shall be there at twilight this (Saturday) evening. It is a good place in case of rain. Love.

"EMILY."

They all raised their eyes from the simple message.

"I—I can't believe Mike's sister ever wrote that!" panted Dolly. "She has said nothing about having expected to meet him at that place."

"She is indoors," Polly said quickly. "We can soon find out."

"Yes, come on."

Dolly had the note as she and her chums streaked for the cottage. In the greatest excitement they all swarmed in by a back doorway, very nearly upsetting a tray of tea-things that Betty was taking to the front room.

"Mrs. Marchmont—Mrs. Marchmont!" was Dolly's wild cry, as she dashed into the sitting-room. "Do look at what I've just found. In an old jacket your brother wore when at work about the place."

The missing lad's sister bounded up from her chair and was next moment over by the window, to read the note by the better light that was there.

"My writing!" she exclaimed incredulously. "But I never wrote this. Oh, I had no hand in this whatever!"

"Then that's how Mike was tricked into falling into your husband's hands!" cried out Polly. "It's as plain as daylight. That note—"

"It lured him to where Ralph was lying in wait for him—yes," said the widow in great agitation. "Ralph imitated my handwriting. But in that case—"

"Gee, girls!" the madcap fairly yelled. Then she laughed an apologising: "Sorry, Miss Addison, but just think what it means."

"Bekas—"

"The note speaks of an empty house further out on the moor," burst out Betty. "And we know the house quite well."

"It's the one that has been up for sale ever since we can remember!" cried Helen Craig. "A couple of miles or more from the school."

"Is Mike there?" jerked out Dolly.

"Ooo, queek, queek!"

"We can soon find out."

"Yes, wather!"

"Bekas—"

"The police!" Aunt Ada broke in upon the juniors' excited babel. "Will some of you run to the school, to get Miss Somerfield to telep—"

"Blow the police!" cried headstrong Polly. "We can find Mike—set him free ourselves!"

"I am going there at once—this instant," declared Mike's sister, moving towards the outer door just as she was. "Oh, if the poor boy—"

"We'll show you the way!" said Betty gaily. "Miss Addison, we simply must be off at once. I am sure that Miss Somerfield would say—"

"Very well, girls. It is not for me to hinder you. But you will come back here?"

"With Mike!" several of them joyfully promised, as they darted away with the rest.
 "Straight across the moor!" Betty called out.
 "And as fast as we can go!" cried Polly.
 "Come on, girls."
 "Yes, queek, queek, bekas—"
 "Hooray!" their hopeful cheering went up.
 "It's all right, Mrs. Marchmont. We shall get him."
 "Yes, wather!"
 They surged through a gateway and were on the wide, dark-looking moor.
 "Now!" shouted Betty. "Come on, Morcove."
 And they ran as they had never run before.

Morcove to the Rescue!

"PHEW!"
 "And we're not there yet."
 "Not nearly."
 "Your two miles or so, Helen."
 That girl laughed breathlessly as she kept in the running.
 "Yes, I admit it is further than I thought."
 Betty glanced aside at Mrs. Marchmont.
 "If you feel tired, Mrs. Marchmont, give up. We girls can—"
 "Oh, I—I must keep up with you all," was the panted answer. "I could never drop behind and wait. Now I am wondering if Mike is not there perhaps, after all."
 "He's there, for a cert," insisted Polly. "It's just the sort of place where anybody might be kept prisoner. Whallop!" she said, after a bad stumble. "Nearly over that time. Goodness, it's rough going!"
 "Is Paula keeping up? Yes, she is!" one of the others realised delightedly, after a glance behind. "Well done, Paula!"
 "I'm all wight, geals!" puffed the elegant one.
 "Bat Jove, if any of you think I am going to drop out—Ow!"

"Zere you go, duffer! Up with you, queek!"
 And Naomer, with more speed than politeness, hauled the beloved duffer out of a tangle of blackberry bushes on to her feet again.

For fifteen minutes they had been rushing and floundering on, with scarce a moment's slackening. The empty house was not in sight yet, partly because visibility was so poor at this late hour of the wintry-like afternoon and partly owing to the undulations of the moor.

Now and then they had a faintly-trodden path to follow for a hundred yards or so; but most of the time, by far, they were plunging and galloping along amidst rank heather and dying bracken and between great clumps of gorse.

As early as this the daylight seemed to be withdrawing under the lowering sky that there was. Eyes that peered eagerly ahead saw how misty the landscape was becoming.

Suddenly, however, two or three of the scholars shouted together:

"There it is—there's the house!"
 Polly still had breath enough for an encouraging cheer.

"Hooray! Stick it, girls! We're there!"
 "Nearly, anyhow!" panted Betty.
 "And I wonder," was Mrs. Marchmont's breathless murmur, "is he there! Does he hear us?"

On they floundered, and three minutes later the foremost runners were bashing through a tangle of bushes that bordered the grounds of the empty house.

"Phew! Talk about a jungle!" Polly puffed.

"The scratches!" Yet she laughed.
 "What about one good shout?" Betty suggested.
 "All together, girls."
 And they shouted:
 "Mike! Mi—chael, hi! Mike!"
 Then listening for any response that might come they heard only their own hard gasping for breath.

The rest came running up quietly. For a moment longer the anxious listening was continued. Then:

"Mike!" they all shouted again, hands framing lips. "Cooee! Cooee—Mike!"
 "Morcove calling!" Polly added the stentorian cry.

"Now listen!"
 Again they kept mute and still, and again no sound came to them out of the mournful silence of the desolate place.

"He's not there!" said the missing boy's sister.
 "He is not there, after all!"
 Then a cry from several of the girls:
 "He is though! Listen!"

IN THE dungeon-like darkness of the empty mansion's wine cellar Mike had awakened suddenly.

"Hallo!" he called out, for it seemed to him that it was an appealing shout that had roused him from sleep. "Hi! Anybody there?"

Scrambling up from the brick floor, cramped in every limb, he groped to that old oak door which, locked against him, had defied all his most desperate attempts at escape.

He was in such a worn-out state now, his closed fists could only pound the door very feebly. So he put his back to it and kicked with his heels.

Thud, thud—thud! That was better! They ought to hear that. Thud! And again—thud!
 "Hi, this way, if you're there!" he hoarsely called.

Or had it been only a fancy, surviving from some wild dream that had come to him, whilst he was in the sleep of utter exhaustion?

Thud! He kicked again. Thud!
 "This way!" he croaked, being able to make no better sound than that with his strained voice.

"CAN HARDLY see."
 "Never mind! Here, girls, here's the way down."

"Oh, good!"
 Some of the breathless girls, first to get inside the dilapidated building, swarmed to where Polly had found a door at the head of cellar steps.

She opened the door, and they all shouted down:

"Mike!"
 "Hi, yes!"
 Piteable was that responsive cry, coming from a lad who had been so full of life and strength.
 "Coming, Mike."

Down the worn brick steps they clattered in groping darkness. Even the rooms and passages above ground had been quite dark to them when they came swarming in through broken windows.

Thud, thud, thud! They heard the imprisoned lad kicking against solid oak.

"All right, Mike! We're here—your sister is here with us. Coming!"

Thus they kept up a chorus of reassuring shouts, whilst the noise he was making guided them to the cellar door.

Betty, feeling over the woodwork for the keyhole, panted furiously.

"Key's gone!"

"That man took it away with him, of course," said Polly breathlessly. "Never mind. Soon do the trick."

"Yes, bekas——"

"Smash it in, girls!"

"That's the ideal! Something to smash with!" the madcap clamoured. "Goodness, we can't see what we're about! Never mind. Find something, girls."

They were scattering as she voiced the impatient cry. Inside the cellar Mike was quiet now. Dolly it was who ran back to the locked door and called through to him.

"Mike!"

"Oh, that you, Dolly?"

"Yes. Your sister is coming; she'll be here in a minute. We rather outran her. Are you nearly done for, Mike?"

"I've had some sleep, Dolly. What time is it?"

"Must be about half-past five now."

"Tuesday?"

"Yes, Mike."

"I wondered if I'd lost count of the days. I don't know how long I slept that last time."

"Have you had any food, Mike—any water to drink?"

"A little, yes."

"Aha, got it!" Polly's exultant shout rang out in the darkness, and next moment she was back at the door, wielding a miniature battering-ram.

It was a short length of timber—part of a massive oak post that had rotted away where it was embedded in the floor, supporting other woodwork.

"Stand clear!" requested Morcove's madcap. "Look out for yourself, Mike."

"Right-ho!"

Bash! Polly drove the end of the battering-ram against the locked door. Bang!

"Goodness, if that fat-faced police-sergeant were here we'd show him!" muttered the madcap.

Bash! again.

"Let me, Polly," entreated Betty. "Or two of us together."

"Yes, bekas——"

"You shoo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bang! Bang! went the battering-ram, with mightier blows than ever, now that two of them were wielding it. Crash!

"Hasn't that done it?"

"No."

"Try again!" cried the captain blithely.

Smash!

And the lock burst.

The door, driven in at last, grated round on its rusty hinges. Betty and Polly staggered back, letting the length of timber fall to the ground. They and others saw only darkness as black as ever beyond the doorway.

But in an instant they knew that Mike was coming out.

"Mike!" they all cried joyfully, as he came floundering into their midst. "Hurrah!"



"It's a note from Mike's sister, Emily!" Dolly gasped, as she triumphantly held out the piece of paper. Oh, if only this would give the chums some clue to Mike's whereabouts!

"I say, jolly good of you, this!" he jerked out stertersously. "But where's Emily?"

"Here's Emily!" one of them called out, as his sister came scurrying down the steps. "Mrs. Marchmont, it's all right; he's here——"

"He's all right, too."

"Yes, bekas, as soon as he has something to eat——"

"Michael!" his sister's half-hysterical cry rose above all the hubbub. "Oh, Mike darling!"

"Hallo, Emily. Are you all right? I am, honest. Just a bit frosty and hungry, that's all. But what's happened then? How on earth did you find out that I was here?"

"The girls, Mike, they found out. Oh, Michael, what we owe to Dolly Delane and these chums of hers! What we owe to Morcove!"

There was a pause, filled in by everyone's hard breathing after so much rush and excitement. Betty & Co. could tell that in the darkness Emily Marchmont was hugging her young brother to her heart.

Suddenly they heard him give a queer little laugh.

"I say, though, I wish somebody would tell me! What about Ralph?"

The chums heard his sister whispering very softly with emotional pauses between one phrase and another. And they knew that this plucky lad who had endured so much and had striven so hard for her sake was being told.

"You are free, Michael dear," Morcove had heard his sister begin by whispering. "And so am I, Michael—free!"

After All!

A FINE car drew up opposite the gate of the Delanes' cottage, and Morcove's headmistress alighted.

"Ah, Miss Somerfield!" cried Dolly's Aunt Ada, advancing from the trellis porch with a very jaunty step. "You will wonder where they all are."

"They'?"

"That poor Mrs. Marchmont and all the girls who came across from the school before tea, and Dolly, too. But come in and I'll explain."

Miss Somerfield, entering the now lamplit sitting-room, noticed one thing. A famous tea was laid for rather more persons than the table could comfortably hold.

"Yes," beamed Aunt Ada, "I have it all ready and waiting for them. Though how long they will be I'm sure I can't say."

"But, Miss Addison, what has become of them then? Girls of mine, off again. Really, I shall have to be—"

"You mustn't dream of being anything of the sort," struck in the new Aunt Ada. "They're the most wonderful lot of girls. Just listen to the latest."

It was a very thrilled headmistress who was listening to what had taken place as the result of the discovery of the false message in the shabby old jacket, when a medley of voices sounded outside the cottage.

"Hark! And they are back at last!"

Both ladies ran through to the back door, for the tell-tale commotion was from a joyous little mob, trooping in from off the moor.

"They said they would return with Mike,"

exclaimed Aunt Ada excitedly. "And surely that sounds as if— Yes, they have! There, Miss Somerfield, what do you think of that?"

"I think it is just like my girls," said Morcove's headmistress, laughing proudly.

Out of the early darkness came Betty & Co., prancing, waving gaily, cheering.

"Hurrah, Miss Addison!"

"Yes, auntie darling. It's all right—"

"Gorjus! Bekas—"

"Mike's here! Mike's safe!"

"So I see!" cried Aunt Ada, running out with the headmistress to meet the excited, breathless crowd in the yard. "Heaven be praised, there is the dear lad."

"You are Mike?" smiled Miss Somerfield, eager to have her first word with the lad who had been the storm-centre of all recent happenings.

"Michael George Washington!" put in happy Dolly Delane, and she and he enjoyed a laugh together, there being some joke of their own in that.

"But Mike to my friends," he added, looking very engagingly at Morcove's headmistress.

"Then Mike it must be, in my case," said Miss Somerfield.

She turned and exchanged an eloquent look with his sister, whose face was transfigured with joy. Then she rounded upon the batch of breathless, warmed-up scholars.

"Well, girls, you seem to have been doing more extraordinary things."

"Yes, bekas—"

"In defiance of all rules. And one of you the Form-captain," added Miss Somerfield, with mock

NOW ON SALE!—

Are these four splendid October issues of the

Schoolgirls' Own Library



Price 4d. Each

Ask Your Newsagent for
Numbers 364, 365, 366, and 367

asperity. "Really, I shall have to make an alteration."

"Zon I know what," shrilled Naomer. "You make me captain of ze Form, and—"

Polly, however, closed this suggestion by very effectively taking the dusky one by the ear.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Dolly's Aunt Ada. "Just look at that Polly Linton."

"She'll end, I'm sure, by becoming a police-woman," jested Miss Somerfield. "Such a knack of taking others into custody."

"But come along in, all of you. Mike, you will be glad to get a wash?"

"That I shall, ma'am," chuckled he, in sly allusion to the relations existing between himself and Miss Addison a few days ago. "I'll use the pump out here—"

"You'll do nothing of the sort!" cried Dolly. "Auntie, Mike can go up to my room, can't he, for a good wash and brush up?"

"Of course he can, my dear."

So indoors she went along with all of them, and whilst he was absent above stairs, getting rid of the worst effects of his imprisonment in the cellar, many a junior's voice helped to supply Miss Somerfield and Aunt Ada with a full account of the sensational rescue.

A minute or two and Mike came down, wonderfully smartened up. Aunt Ada, in the act of pouring out for her big tea-party, paused to take a good look at him.

"Well!" she said. "And you are the same boy who odd-jobbed for me about the place?"

"The boy who slept several nights in the out-buildings," laughed Dolly, her own eyes shining upon him. "And where will he sleep to-night, that's the next question?"

"I can say," answered Miss Somerfield, with one of her most benign smiles. "He will sleep in his own bed, in his own home. My car is available."

She turned to Mike's sister, detecting a sudden wistful look in eyes that had held so much tragedy and sorrow of late.

"You'd like to go home with your brother, Mrs. Marchmont, without an hour's delay?"

"To my unmarried sister; to the old home again," murmured the one who had been away from home so long.

She turned to Miss Somerfield.

"But it's a goodish distance."

"That makes no difference. My chauffeur

won't mind. You can be off in the car at once, and I will walk back to the school with my girls. Then I shall know," smiled Miss Somerfield, "they are not getting into further mischief."

"Mischievous!" echoed Polly. "I like that!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But you must all have tea first," beamed Aunt Ada, standing ready to preside at the inviting-looking table. "Chairs round, and anything else that will do to sit upon. Emily, you sit here, with Mike next to you. And now I wonder; whom would you like to have upon your right, Mike?"

"I know!" cried Morcove's madcap. "Dolly!" And there was laughter and clapping as homely Dolly, bright-eyed and flushing with delight, took the favoured seat.

An hour later Morcove was saying good-bye to the brother and sister.

But it was not to be good-bye for ever.

There would be a day, before the end of the term, when the school would see Mike and Emily again.

They were to come over to Morcove in a little while, and what a day that would be for Study 12, with Dolly, of course, staying on after school, taking her full share in all the jollity.

Study 12's would be the proud privilege of having Mike and his two sisters to tea, and Aunt Ada had gladly promised to be there.

Meantime Mike was going to write to Dolly from home and she was going to write back. They had come to that chummy arrangement between themselves whilst sitting at tea together.

Betty & Co. had gone back to the school with the headmistress now, and in the cosy cottage Dolly and her Aunt Ada were alone together.

"I wouldn't look at your schoolwork this evening, Dolly dear," counselled Aunt Ada lovingly, glancing up from her needlework as she sat by the log fire. "You have done enough for one day, I'm sure."

So Dolly elapped shut the books she had been going to use for homework.

"Are you sure you don't mind being with no one besides myself, dear?"

"Not a bit, auntie darling. I—I am just perfectly happy to-night."

"I'm so glad, Dolly. And I am, too!" she smiled as she bent and kissed her niece.

THE END.



You'll just love

"The Girl-Queen's Rebellion!"

by Marjorie Stanton in next week's

STUDY INSPECTION IN THE FOURTH!

Study 12, swept and garnished for the occasion, is as neat as any other study Miss Somerfield has inspected, and yet—Morcove's Head is angry. One of Study 12's occupants must go to the Detention Room as a result. Naomer Nakara is the one, and all because of a Cheap, china jug!

SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN—2d.