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HOLIDAY THRILLS FOR THE MORCOVE CHUMS
Delightful New Series of Complete Easter Tales Begins Inside

The SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN 2d

No. 687. Vol. 27.
Week ending
APRIL 7th, 1934.

EVERY
TUESDAY



**ACCIDENT
OR—?**

See this week's novel complete Morcove holiday story

FOUR SUPERB STORY FEATURES WITHIN

Number One of a Delightful New Series of Complete Morcove
Holiday Tales



The Morcove Paying Guests

BY MARJORIE STANTON

HOLIDAYS are here again, and this year the Morcove-Grangemoor party are spending Easter as paying guests at Cromlech Manor, the new home of Dolly Delane and her parents. That the holiday will be as eventful as it is novel is shown by the dramatic happenings which follow swiftly upon the chums' arrival at the manor.

Happy Days

"IS this the way to Cromlech Manor?"

"Eh?"

"He's deaf, Betty; let me try!"

And Polly Linton, with her usual love of fun, fairly shouted at the old, bent stone-breaker, who was holding up a curved hand to his ear.

"Is this—the-way—to Cromlech Manor—please?"

"Cromlech Manor, missy? Ah, you mean th' place where Mr. Delane has just gone to live, do 'ee?"

"That's right!"

"Ah, Cromlech Manor, now! Go on up th' hill and keep on over, and there you'll see un, lying in th' hollow—ay!"

"Thanks!" dinned Betty Barton, who as Form

captain at Morcove School had led the cheering on breaking-up day for the Easter holidays, at the end of last week. "Very warm!"

"Eh?"

"Lovely day!" yelled Polly, smiling from ear to ear.

"Bai Jove!" chuckled Paula Creel. "And you might tell him that we greatly appreciate the nice woad he manages to keep, yes, wather!"

Then Jack Linton—only brother of madcap Polly—took a turn in the parley with this white-whiskered veteran.

"The young lady," Jack vociferated, "is so glad to see such a nice big hill to climb!"

"Am I!" said Paula, whose nature it was to be anything but energetic.

"Hi, Mister Whiskers," shrilled the fifth and

last member of the bicycling party, who was just that dusky imp, Naomer Nakara—Morcove's royal scholar. "Bekas, here you are; ze last of my chocolate, and ze last of my biscuits, and a bit of cake, and—what ze diggings!—you may as well have zis bottle of lemonade! Bekas, we are nearly there—good job!"

The old countryman was much too slow for such a mercurial spirit as Naomer. So she dumped the doubtless welcome variety of eatables, stuck the bottle of lemonade on top, and was then ready to re-mount with her chums and ride on.

Although there were only these five juniors to go the rest of the way to Cromlech Manor, many of their best chums were to spend the Easter holidays with them at the lonely country house.

It was indeed the joyful belief of the five that they would get to the Manor presently, to find all the others waiting to greet them. Some were to have arrived yesterday.

They themselves had come fifty miles by train this morning, their "bikes" in the van. Then they had taken to the machines, with a good seven-mile ride to do from the nearest railway station for Cromlech Manor.

"Gosh, this is a hill!"

"Tewwible!"

And they all dismounted, to go up it on foot, wheeling the machines.

"Good job we sent the luggage in advance," Jack grinned.

"Bad job if it doesn't turn up for days," Polly grimaced, with the roguish intention of perturbing Paula, that great one for dress. "Remember, although it is Cromlech Manor, it's a grand hotel now! Awkward—eh, Paula?—if we are the only ones who can't get into something nice this evening."

"That will do, Polly deah," said Paula, trying not to look dismayed. "In any case, you are greatly exaggerating. It is true, Dolly Delane's pawnts hev had to start winning the place as a country hotel; but the idea of it's being gwand—absurd!"

"Not ze bit of eet! Bekas, eet says dancing, in ze bill of fare—"

"Bill of fare—ha, ha, ha! Kid," Polly addressed the dusky one with the usual degree of withering scorn, "you think so much about food; even a brochure becomes a bill of fare."

"I wonder if there will be many others there?" Betty pondered aloud whilst the toilsome climb proceeded. "We'll be a crowd ourselves. I don't know how many the place holds—"

"Let's hope, anyhow, that it's packed out," Polly broke in. "For we all want the Delanes to do well out of their venture, don't we?"

"Yes, wather!"

"Bekas, eef zey don't make ze zing go with a bang, zen zey will have to pack up—sweendle for ze Delanes," Naomer piped in. "Not being able to afford to do without paying guests."

There was ample reason for these and other remarks, all expressing a hearty desire to see "the Delanes" succeed in their venture.

Until quite recently, Dolly Delane had been a junior at Morcove School. The only child of a very homely, farming couple, who had a small place close to Morcove, Dolly had been the school's only day girl. Her parents were at that time in a quite humble way.

Now, however, they had come into a large, landed property—but with no money for upkeep. Cromlech Manor and its two thousand acres had

come to Mr. Delane as a totally unexpected legacy from a distant relative.

As the terms of the inheritance forbade selling, Mr. and Mrs. Delane had instantly realised that it would mean a big fight to keep things going and make both ends meet. But Mr. Delane was a born farmer, and he was game to pull those half derelict two thousand acres round in time. Then there had been the happy idea of his living, capable wife: Why not take paying guests?

Promptly, some of Dolly's best friends at the school had been seized with their idea. Why not go, all of them, as paying guests for the Easter "hols"?

Carried unan. And, it may be added, as unanimously approved by all fathers and mothers concerned.

"Oh, look!"

That was Betty, now that they were all nearly at the top of the giant hill.

"That must be the Cromlech!" she panted.

"After which the Manor takes its name."

She pointed away to the left of the summit. There, strikingly solitary on the wide sweep of desolate grassland, a huge structure like a great stone table could be seen.

It was formed of an enormous flat stone, set upon several upright stones.

The juniors were at the top of the hill, with a grand bit of free-wheeling in front of them now. Remounting, away they went, hair flying in the wind.

"Hi, hi! Loo-oo-ook out!" Jack warned, whizzing downhill. "See you later, girls! On the right—Cromlech Manor, hooray!"

They could see the old house now; could enjoy a bird's-eye view of the whole estate, with the Manor lying snugly amongst some trees.

But the run downhill was too delightful for any slowing up so that the view could be enjoyed without risk of a spill. Jack leading, they went skimming down, and were so rested at the end of the full mile of freewheeling they thought nothing of the slight rise that took them the rest of the way to the Manor.

Except for some pleasant score-crying from the tennis court behind the house, all was silence as the five dismounted near the porch.

But, a moment after they had "parked" their machines under a budding chestnut, a light and quick step was audible from just outside the front door.

Eagerly they flashed round, whilst putting the machines together. They felt certain that it was one of their chums, coming out to greet them. Then they beheld—a complete stranger.

She was a girl, still of school age, but Morcove School certainly had not the like of her. Anything more supercilious the five had never encountered.

Instead of at least according the new arrivals a smile, she stalked right past them, chin in air, as if to imply that she refused to notice them until they had been properly introduced.

She was alone, and her very loneliness suggested an absurd "exclusiveness." At the same time, was obvious that although she would not look at the five, they were very welcome to look at her—admiringly.

But there was little admiration in Polly's exclamation after the girl had strutted out of sight.

"Gosh! Who is that, then?"

Jack grinned.

"That," said he, "is one of the other p.g.'s!"

Upon which Paula, in a swooning tone, ejaculated:

"Howwows!"

Who's the Girl?

"OH, here they are!" That was Betty's much-relieved cry as familiar figures suddenly burst upon the scene, having run round from the tennis court.

"Coo-ee!" Polly promptly waved. "Well, Judy—Dave!" Young Bobby Bloot was also here, but Polly would only nod to him, in accordance with her make-believe dislike of him, as being a glutton. "Oh, and there you are, Dolly darling!"—rushing to give the homely one a kiss.

Judy and Dave Cardew were brother and sister who could never tease each other as Polly teased Jack and vice-versa. Each was as serious as the other.

As for Dolly Delane, with her dimpled cheeks—her blithe remarks, as soon as the first greetings were over, showed the sort of girl she was.

"I should have been helping in the kitchen, but mother would make me get a game of tennis with these others. Now that you've turned up I must fly—let mumsie know—and then it will save her legs if I show you girls the rooms you're to have. But come along in; you must be tired after the ride from the station! That hill—"

"Yes, wather, bai Jove!"

"Oh—Jimmy! Here's Jimmy Cherrol!" was now Betty's glad cry, as another schoolboy, in grey flannels, came vaulting over a low flint wall. Capless, he looked very rough-haired and altogether robust.

"Cheerio, Jimmy—"

"Just happened to be looking for a lost tennis ball," he accounted for his belated appearance. "Great weather, isn't it? And this place—"

"It's O.K.?" Jack gaily interred.

"Super! We shall have a grand time," Jimmy declared. "Er—the others will be here at any minute? Pam, with Madge, Tess and Helen?"

"I—don't—know," Polly said roguishly, and, sure enough, Jimmy seemed to take alarm.

"What makes you say that, Polly?"

"Because I don't know, that's all!"

"Oh!" He reddened, now that she was laughing. "I thought perhaps you'd heard—the Swanlake batch not coming after all!"

"Never mind about Pam for just a single moment, Jimmy boy," said Jack genially. "Who's the girl who tries to look like a film star?"

"He means Thelma Curtis," smiled Judy. "She's staying here with her mother, although it doesn't seem quite the place, I must say, for such—such up-stage people. Still, they make two more for the Delances, and that's everything."

Judy could say this as Dolly Delane had run indoors to let her mother know about the latest arrivals.

"Thelma Curtis," echoed Betty. "It sounds, somehow, a suitable name."

"Very suitable," said Dave tersely, and then Betty and Polly gazed at him.

But, although their looks plainly said: "Now what do you mean by that, Dave!" he offered no explanation. It was like him to leave the girls

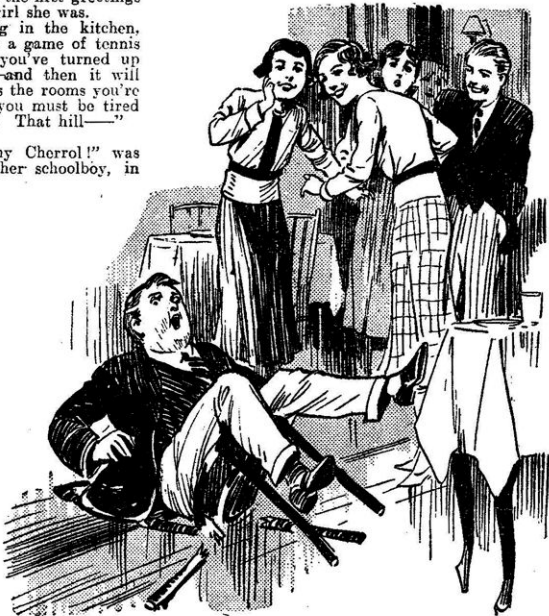
wondering "Why!" He slowly worked away from the group of chatters, dribbling a pebble across the carriage drive—and thinking, thinking his own thoughts all the time. you could be sure.

"Mrs. Delanc!"

"Oh!"

She was slipping across to them from the inviting porch.

"My dears, welcome! More of you boys and girls to welcome to our new home! As Dolly says, it doesn't seem like running a country hotel, to make both ends meet. It is just like having all her dearest chums to stay with us, as if we were quite well off! Come along in, all! We won't wait for the others, but will have lunch as soon as you have seen your rooms and had a wash."



There was a fearful crash as Bobby Bloot's chair gave way beneath him. The general hilarity was punctuated by shrieks of delight from Naomer: "Gorjus, Bobby! Pipooray!"

Dolly took the newly-arrived girls upstairs, and after showing Naomer and Paula to their bedrooms, she went on to a neighbouring one with Betty and Polly.

"Electric light! And running hot and cold!" Betty commented. "My word, Dolly!"

"It isn't paid for yet," was the rather solemn response. "But dad and mumsie felt they must do the thing properly, and so they had the place modernised, on the instalment plan. I do hope we work up a good connection. If not—"

"You'll be packed out all through the summer, you see," Betty gaily predicted.

"And now I must fly," Dolly said gaily, and turned to run downstairs and help her mother. The Morcove paying guests had glimpsed at

least two comely maids, but Dolly really was a second edition of her energetic mother.

"Jolly," Betty murmured, looking out of the window whilst Polly had first turn at the wash-basin. "Oh, there's that Curtis girl. I say, Polly dear, even if she isn't exactly our sort, we'll do our best to be friendly."

"Of course—if she'll let us," Polly said, and started towelling her face. "I fancy Judy, anyway, has not got much change out of the girl."

"Dave was very funny, Polly, about her, didn't you think?"

"Dave's always funny," Polly shrugged. "Besides, we know he simply can't stand anyone who is—sidey."

"Hallo, though!"

"Why, what, Betty?"

"Funnier than ever," said Betty, still idly gazing out of the window. "He is walking to meet that Curtis girl—"

"Dave is?" There was something more than incredulity in Polly's casting aside the towel and darting to look out of the window. A certain grimness of expression proclaimed annoyance.

"So he is!" she emitted, and looked as black as thunder. "Oh, and she can be friendly enough to him, anyhow! Look at her—that smile, ugh! Well, if Dave likes to—"

"Miaow, Polly!"

"What, think I'm jealous? Pooh!"

The luggage had come, and their portions were even now in this bed-room, waiting to be unpacked. Polly rather furiously went to one of her bags, snapped open the fastenings, and rummaged inside for a comb and brush.

The dressing-table, with its mirror, was set near the window. As she took her stand in front of the glass, to give tidying touches to her hair, she peeped over the sill again.

"If Dave likes to go round the garden with her, let him, I say," she further remarked.

When, a minute later, Betty was at the dressing-table, she heard the voices of a girl and a boy, just below in the garden. Water in the basin had been draining away with a noisy gurgle; now, in the silence of the room—for Polly had scampered off—Betty heard Dave saying:

"Not time now. The gong will be going for lunch."

"This afternoon, then?" Thelma Curtis suggested winningly.

"Must see what the others are doing."

It was not this bit of overheard talk that caused Betty to step sharply to the window. She was no eavesdropper. But suddenly the faint whine of a car was audible, drawing in off the road, and she thought:

"That's Pam, and the rest of them!"

At first glance out of the window, however, Betty experienced a pang of disappointment. A lady and gentleman were in the car, which was one Betty had never seen before. He was driving, and he stopped within fifty yards of the porch, putting forth his head to call a genial:

"Miss!"

Thelma Curtis, thus hailed, ran to the car, and as soon as the gentleman had put a question to her she launched into voluble talk.

"Some holiday-makers, wanting to know what the place is like!" Betty guessed, turning back to the dressing-table. "Well, I hope they stay. Two more for the Delanes!"

In a few moments she was ready to hurry away to rejoin her chums. The gong was whanging. She glanced out of the window again and saw that the gentleman was now in talk with his wife,

as if inclined to turn round and go on and find a place elsewhere.

And there was Thelma Curtis, as Betty could plainly see, walking towards the house now, with a smile of malicious satisfaction!

"Oh," Betty gasped to herself. "Horrid of her! If she has put those people off coming here—what a nasty thing to do!"

Under One Roof

THE juniors, trooping into the large dining-room, rather gaily realised that for this meal, at any rate, they were to be all to themselves.

Even Mrs. Delane was off the scene.

"She's attending to some fresh people who have just turned up by car unexpectedly," Dolly passed the word round, rather excitedly. "I don't know if they will decide to stay—"

"Oh, have they come inside after all?" Betty exclaimed—and thought it only right to give Thelma Curtis a steady look. "I thought they were going to drive away! So glad, Dolly dear; two more!"

"Yes! And so will you all"—Dolly lifted her happy voice—"please choose your tables?"

Loud cheers from Morrove and Grangemoor, whilst Thelma Curtis aloofly stepped to that table which had been allotted to her and her mother. Mrs. Curtis being away for the day, Thelma would be in solitary state at that table.

"Here, Bobby—queek, next to me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What do you want, Jack?" Polly naturally demanded, aware of his intention to sit with her and Betty.

"Any objection?" he inquired affably.

"The very strongest! Look at Jimmy—sitting all by himself at that table—"

"Hush!" Jack said, in a stage-whisper. "Jimmy's reserved that table for himself and—er—Pam, when she gets here. H'm!" he coughed, drawing up his chair to sit down. "You know, Miss Barton, this reminds me of my old school-days. Such youthful spirits; such—"

Bang, crash!

"Oh, ha, ha, ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha!"

All these sudden screams of laughter were due to the fact that Bobby Bloot's chair had, without warning, collapsed under him. It was mostly in pieces on the floor, with him lying amongst several detached spokes.

"Gorjus!" shrieked Naomer, evenly more amused than any of the others. "Pipooray!"

"That boy" Polly sighed, casting up her eyes.

"Yes!" Jack said, and pretended to adjust a monocle, whilst eyeing young Bloot most sternly.

"You young Booter!"

"It wasn't my fault!" poor Bobby protested,

as his rotund figure came erect.

"Not your fault!" Jack withered him. "Didn't you tell Mrs. Delane that they always give you an extra strong chair at home, at school? Have you forgotten the day when you went through the floor of a taxi, Bloot?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

By now, Dave was picking up the chair and collecting the odd spokes that had fallen out. He went out of the room with the relics, and did not return until the first course had been served.

Dolly met him in the doorway, exclaiming:

"So sorry you had the trouble, Dave; thanks! Can't make out why that chair went like that! It must have been ready to come to bits. Lucky it wasn't a grown-up."

There was a nod from Dave. When he got back to his table, he lifted his chair to examine it, and most of his chums laughed. Afterwards, they rather felt that it had been a mistake to laugh, for Dave had not inspected the chair by way of a joke.

Then Thelma Curtis, whose table was next to the one he was sharing with Judy and Paula, smiled across to him.

"Like the rest of the place—rather shaky?" she suggested. "My bed broke down the other night."

"Did it?" said Dave, with more interest than the fault-finding remarks warranted—or so Polly thought. Polly did not want to pay attention, but she had to!

"Don't you think this water tastes—funny?" This question being put to him by Thelma, Dave took a sip from his glass.

"Hard," he said. "But that's grand drinking water. Where does it come from, do you know?"

"Oh, yes," said Thelma blandly. "They have their own reservoir, on the hills. A poor affair." She gave a disdainful smile.

"And the rats!" At this instant there were murmurs at the doorway. Mrs. Delane entered, ushering in a lady and gentleman. They were the elderly pair who had turned up in that car.

So they had decided to stay, in spite of having the place run down to them by Thelma Curtis, on the first inquiry. Betty darted another glance

at that girl. The excessively pretty face was suller than snow.

But it seemed a waste of time to bother about her when there was such general jollity to enjoy. Far from putting a restraint upon all the juniors' chatter and laughter, the lady and gentlemen were soon revelling in all the quiet fun.

First to rise from lunch was Thelma Curtis. She suddenly jumped up and stalked out, with that showing-off air of hers, leaving her sweet untouched. "Oh, apple-art again!" she had commented out loud when it was brought to her.

Then, just as all the chums were filing out, they heard the drone of another arriving car. And this time it really was—Pam Willoughby, with Madge and Tess and Helen!

Dave Goes Off!

BEING as late as all this, they came in for a playful demonstration at the porch.

Instead of affectionate cries, there was facetious cheering and booping, all of which tall Pam Willoughby, for one, took serenely, as she took most things in life.

Nor did dark-haired, clever-looking Madge Minden, or jolly Helen Craig—who had been staying with Pam at Swanlake—mind being teased like this. The affectionate greetings when they came at last, were all the nicer for having been deferred.

"We've put you about, Mrs. Delane—"

"Not at all, my dears!"

"We found we were on quite the wrong road," Pam said, "and yet we had passed a signpost that said we were going the right way. I believe the signpost had got twisted round, so that it pointed the wrong way!"

"Whereabouts is the signpost that sent you wrong?" Dave inquired casually of Pam.

"Oh, no distance from here—only a couple of miles, say, down the valley. Hallo, Jimmy!" She conferred her adorable smile. "But, look here, all of you who have had lunch mustn't wait for us. You want to get out—"

"No-o-o!"

Very definitely Morcove was minded to go out all in one big drove. Meantime, there was plenty to see and do round about the Manor. Some of the girls ran upstairs to change into tennis shoes. The court, in the April sunshine, looked very attractive.

Presently there was a reunion on the drive in front of the Manor. Tess Trelawney was inevitably burdened with her sketching "tackle," and Polly said:

"You can let Jack carry those things for you, Tess! Where are the boys?"

"Here they come!"

"Gosh, you ought to see the farm!" Jack enthused, after dashing up with Jimmy and Bobby. "There's one barn as big as a theatre—"

"Empty," Jimmy said breathlessly. "And we've been thinking—fine place for a dance. Rig up some Chinese lanterns—"



"Dave, won't you come back?" Jimmy pleaded. "You know, Polly is—cut up about this." But Dave only shrugged and walked on.

"And set the whole place on fire!" Polly nodded, in a taken-for-granted way. "You boys! But now—where's Dave? Hasn't he been with you?"

"Here is Judy; perhaps she knows?" said Helen, after Jack, Jimmy and Bobby had shaken their heads.

But Judy's brows went up when she found that Dave was being awaited.

"I quite thought he was with you," she exclaimed.

Then they raised a lively shout for:

"Dave!"

There was no response, nor did he finally appear.

"Oh, come on," Polly stamped. "Or we shall never get out this afternoon."

"But—"

"If he has preferred to go off on his own!" Polly exploded, then she saw Judy looking distressed, and was sorry for the outburst.

"A Company, fall in for the route march! By the right, quick march!" bawled Jack, and in his nonsensical way he put himself at the head of the party, blowing out his chest like a sergeant-major.

The idea for this afternoon was to do a first wander round and be back in good time for tea.

A quiet walk had this special appeal, also, for the juniors' first day at the Manor. Many of them, until they met under that ancient roof an hour or two ago, had not seen each other for a week or more. So there would be lots to talk about. Jimmy and Pam, for instance, had a lot to say to each other—not in one big burst, for they did not keep together at the start.

But after a while Jimmy gravitated more and more frequently to Pam's side, and had less and less reason for feeling that he was boring her. He found himself talking a great deal to Pam, with a vague sense of keeping back a great deal that she might not like.

He was sure that she wouldn't like him to say anything about her clothes—just knock-about clothes for the country, yet they seemed to fit her like a glove. What he wanted to say, but didn't dare, was that she must have made the Curtis girl sit up and take notice.

For Jimmy had a fancy that Thelma Curtis aimed at being just what Pam was by birth and ancestry. As if any girl could successfully imitate Pam's gracefulness, or her habitual serenity.

Thinking about this, Jimmy grinned. This was one of those moments when he was jogging along at Pam's elbow, with the others scattered about the sunny glade which had been discovered, a mile from the Manor.

"Wild daffs, Jimmy!"

"Yes; pick some?"

"Oh, no! They're best where they are. Oh, and do look at that squirrel!"

"I say—he's a beauty! One of the red sort. Catch him, Pam?"

"No—why?"

"Oh, I dunno!" Jimmy could only say, lamely. "Thought you might like me to, if I could. Sorry, Pam!"

"Yes, well, I like things to be left alone. People come into our woods at Swanlake, and pick huge bunches of bluebells, and then throw the bunches away in the end—not worth the fag of carrying. Why don't they leave them growing. Of course, it's different if they want them to cheer up someone. Here, we are getting left behind by the others."

She ran to put herself with one batch of her chums, and Jimmy only dawdled, wanting to kick himself. Dash! Now, he believed, she was

put out with him. Silly ass he had been, anyhow, to offer to catch the squirrel. Just as if he could have! She must think he had wanted to SHOW OFF!

"And now, children," said Jack, in his best uncle-in-charge manner, "before we go any farther—"

"Tea," piped in Naomer. "Bekas, eef we ask them nicely—"

"But this is all right," Helen pleaded. "It's glorious! And don't we want to see the whole place; work right round—"

"Oh, don't mention work!" Jack shuddered.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Polly is in ze temper, bekas Dave didn't come!"

"I am sure I am not in any temper. As if it matters to me— Oh, hang!" Polly flared out, for there was a good deal of merriment. "It isn't funny!"

"Extremely sewious, yes, with— Owpl!"

"Then don't you try to be funny," cried Polly, shaking Paula.

"Bless my soul!" said Jack, resuming his rôle of an elderly shepherd of the flock. "Tut, tut! Pray, children, compose your quarrels. Besides"—suddenly changing back to his own jovial self—"here is Dave—"

"Oh, where? Where?" It was a frantic chorus.

"My mistake," Jack remarked, instead of telling them which way to look. "I should have said he is there—"

"But where—where?" cried Betty and others. "No, you won't see him, for he has turned aside—those trees hide him. I think he saw us—"

"And wants to avoid us?" was Madge's incredulous cry. "Surely not!"

"We haven't offended him in any way?" Betty questioned.

"Offended him," said Judy. "How could we have? I'll run and speak to him. That way, Jack?"

"That's right, Judy. Just beyond the trees."

They waited, watching her as she sped away. The trees Jack had indicated formed a strip of woodland, bordering a valley road that led to Cromlech Manor.

"We came up that road in the car, after getting off the map because of that signpost," Pam murmured.

Then, like her companions, she gave a slight start.

Judy was suddenly turning back.

"Now what's the matter with Judy?" wondered Helen. "Changed her mind."

"Yes, bai Jove; wemawkable!"

"I thought I wouldn't catch Dave after all," Judy said, with an effort at nonchalance, as soon as she had rejoined them all. "You might have said that he had that Curtis girl with him, Jack."

"What! I didn't see her!" Jack gasped.

"What's he doing, trotting about with her?"

"I'm sure I can't say," Dave's sister said, distress creeping into her voice. "And I certainly was not going to ask him."

Dave's a Mystery

"WHAT are we standing here for?"

That was Polly Linton—the best thing she could say, after an embarrassing silence on the part of all, lasting nearly a minute.

"I feel—I don't know," Judy exclaimed, in a

rather suffocated voice—"as if I ought to apologise for Dave. I feel he has spoiled the afternoon for us."

"Oh, don't upset yourself, Judy," Polly said hastily. "It's not nice for you; but the rest of us—do we mind that he's not here? I'm sure I don't!"

"Ooo, whopper! Bekas—"

"Sh'r'rrp, kid!" Polly stormed. "Oh, come on, all!"

"Back to the Manor, then?" Betty said; but now Polly gave a dissenting:

"No! Those two are walking back already, aren't they? Then let us stay out!"

There was another heavy silence. Even when a fresh wandering-on was in progress, no one seemed to have anything to say.

Suddenly Jack laughed. He went off into great guffaws. He stamped about, doubled up with merriment.

"Well?" Polly stopped still to glare at him.

"Ha, ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha! Oh dear!"

"Idiot!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's one thing," Polly informed him witheringly, "we run no risk of anyone enticing you away from us. No one would have you."

"Oh, I dunno," Jack grinned, causing smiles to go round. "I haven't had a chance yet. Anyhow, you'll all get your Dave back. That old owl, with nothing to say ever—ha, ha, ha! She's doing all the talking, not getting a word out of him, no. Just as if he wants to trot round with her—our old son-of-a-gun Dave—ha, ha, ha! But I!" And the fun-lover thumped a manly chest.

"Wait! We—shall—see—har, har!"

This was all very well. Even sedate Madge and high-minded Pam laughed in appreciation of Jack's praiseworthy attempt to make light of the annoying occurrence.

Afterwards, however, there was an inclination to debate the matter in twos and threes, voices all subdued.

"I'm sorry for Judy, aren't you?" Helen said, walking with Pam. "At lunch, that Curtis girl was speaking across to Dave, without taking any notice of Judy. Check!"

"She mayn't know the way to behave," Pam responded serenely. "But Dave does. There was a lot of truth in what Jack said so jokingly—must have been. She just put herself in Dave's way, when he was out for his walk."

"But—why, he went off alone!"

"That was strange. But he's a strange fellow, Dave. He often makes you wonder—"

"Pam" her chum struck in, stopping dead—"there he is!"

"Who—Dave?"

"Yes, look," Helen said softly, with a directing nod. "The others haven't seen him. But there he is, and he's alone now. She's gone."

Pam calmly gazed in the direction that had been indicated. Some roadside trees were not fully out, and the lacework of budding branches just enabled Dave to be seen, sauntering very slowly along the road. His dawdling steps were taking him towards the Manor, for which Pam and the rest of the juniors were now making, by a round-about way.

After a moment Pam looked aside and saw Jimmy. As he was looking her way, she could mutely signal him to come to her.

"Jimmy"—very calmly—"Dave's over there, all by himself now. Won't you run across and ask him if he won't join us? Never mind if you feel—a bit—fed-up—"

"Oh, I don't mind anything," Jimmy blurted out, and the implied "for you" was so obvious that Pam laughed.

"Nice boy, Jimmy," she said, with her usual calm candour to Helen, after he had nipped away. "Nice boy," Helen agreed. "But nothing in him!"

"Oh, isn't there?" Pam returned.

JIMMY CHERROL'S way of handling Dave was going to bear out, perhaps, Helen's poor opinion of him; but at least this could be said in his favour. Jimmy had no illusions about his special fitness to act as emissary.

He and Dave were great chums, but with utterly different natures. It was the difference between Dave, strolling thoughtfully up the valley road, whilst Jimmy came charging like an elephant through the strip of woodland, with the result that the first words were as breathless as they were clumsy.

"What's all this, Dave?"

"Hallo, Jimmy! What's all what?"

"This!"

"I don't get you, Jimmy?"

"Being a silly ass, aren't you, this afternoon?" Jimmy panted. "I mean—oh, I say, look here, Dave, why not be a mixer? You're to come along now, anyhow—"

"Am I?" Dave smiled quietly.

"Yes; Pam says so," Jimmy fired this off as a triumphant shot. Then he felt horrified. "At least—no, Pam didn't say that. I'm wrong. Don't think Pam is—is wild with you. But, Dave—"

"I'd rather not come, Jimmy," said Dave, quietly affable. "I hope they won't feel it's being unkind. But—"

"But, man! You went off, all by yourself, for a start!"

"I know I did—"

"And that Curtis girl—"

"Oh, did you all see me with her? She cropped up, somehow. She's a little way ahead, now—"

"I see; mean to say you got shot of her, wanting to join us? But you didn't come across, although you must have known where we were? So I don't quite see, even now—"

"No; well—"

"Dave, come on now—"

"No, Jimmy. Fact is, I've got to hurry on to the Manor."

"What! Catch her up again?"

"Look here, Jimmy, don't keep on, because—"

"But Pam—Pam sent me!" Jimmy stressed. "I suppose she was thinking of Judy, and—and Polly. You know, Polly is hurt about this, Dave!" was the finishing cry.

For he, with a shrug, was walking on again. It had been the shrugging away of such provocation as would have caused most fellows to lose their temper.

"Dave!"

"It's all right, Jimmy!"

But was it? Jimmy, floundering back over rough ground to where Pam and the rest were straggling along, could only see one way of preventing things from going from bad to worse. He'd have to take the blame for Dave's latest action. After all, Jimmy argued with himself, he was to blame. Another chap would have put things differently.

Hot and flustered, he was not rendered less uncomfortable by a mild yet inimical inquiry from Polly:

"And where," asked Polly, "have you been?"

"Oh—er—only to see if Dave would come and

join us, that's all. I saw him—er—the girl had gone on in advance of him to the Manor, and so—

"It's my doing," Pam intervened calmly. "I saw Dave first, and asked Jimmy to go and speak to him."

"Wouldn't Dave come even when you asked him, Jimmy?" Judy exclaimed in a pained tone.

"Er—no, but that's my fault," Jimmy hastily stated. "I asked him all the wrong way. I—Dave's all right; it's only that I—well, I expect I rattled him. Sorry!"

"So the Curtis girl has got back to the Manor by now?" Jack sparkled. "Chance for me to chum up with her. So-long, boys!"

And, with a business-like buttoning of his jacket, he made pretence of scooting for the Manor. In a few moments, however, he was turning back to incur further annihilating looks from his sister, by teasing her.

As for Jimmy, he kept away from Pam until they were all straggling up to the Manor House porch. Perhaps she was loath to go in, when the afternoon was at its very best, for she stood just short of the porch to gaze around.

"Sorry, Pam!" said Jimmy, after coming up behind her like a faithful spaniel.

"Whatever have you got to be sorry about, Jimmy?"

"Oh, you know what I am. It was all right for you to send me along on the quiet, but I made a mull of it. I'm not tactful. Er—I see you did pick some flowers after all, Pam."

This, to be sure, was a pretty good example of more tactlessness; but Pam retained her serenity.

"A few," she acknowledged. "Have them?"

"Me?" he stared. "Why should I have them?"

"Because," said Pam, "you've earned them."

Then Dolly came up, looking radiantly happy about something.

"Two more people just come in!" she gave the glad news to Pam and Jimmy, having already told the others. "A lady and her daughter. Fancy—we're full up—full."

"Splendid!" Pam said heartily. "Where's Dave? Do you know, Dolly?"

"Oh, yes. He came in a few minutes after the Curtis girl, and I saw them; a minute since, playing clock golf together."

Just Like the Madcap

POLLY LINTON, looking out of a bed-room window whilst waiting her turn at the wash-basin, remarked:

"Clock-golf! How exciting!"

"Well, never mind, Polly dear. Don't look, that's all!"

"I'm not looking, Betty! I'm only"—slam! the sash came down—"closing the window!"

"Fancy, Polly, the Delanes are full up now," Betty rejoiced, seizing a towel. "It is a Mrs. Drake, a widow, and her daughter—a grown-up daughter, so there isn't much in it for us. But it's fine for the Delanes."

"Yes." Pause. "What are we going to do after tea, Betty?"

"Let's make it a game of cricket, Polly. Your brother says a meadow behind the farm buildings is just right—no long grass, and it's been rolled. I don't mind."

This dull response was too significant to be ignored by Betty. She turned round.

"Polly dear—"

"Of course," Polly suddenly smiled fiercely,

"you will ask Thelma Curtis to play? Otherwise,

Dave may not want to play. And although I don't care a scrap what Dave does—"

"I certainly shan't ask her to play," Betty said, forcefully. "I consider that Curtis girl has acted abominably. Making herself nice to Dave, and not having a word to say to his sister—his sister! Bad enough if she had ignored us, but to ignore his sister!"

"That's why I say—oh, but there goes the teagong. Betty, don't wait for me. I'd rather you didn't."

Betty, at any rate, had tact. It was one of the things that had made her such a fine Form captain. She obeyed Polly's request; but outside the bed-room she waited for her chum. They ought to go downstairs together. Polly was the last girl in the world to be emotional, but at this moment, perhaps—shedding just a tear or two, was she, in secret?

If so, it could be understood. She and Dave had always been such good chums. His being a special pal of Jack's had helped to make them so.

Betty, whilst she waited, had time to admire this part of the great old house. She was in a fine broad corridor, the walls hung with dark oil-paintings that had been inherited with the property, like the old oak furniture and the faded carpets.

No mistake, Cromlech Manor was a fascinating place. It only needed to be known and people would flock to it.

Polly came out, to find Betty studying a picture. More tact! Morocco's Form captain knew better than to look to see if Polly's eyes told of a recent private weep. She let it be assumed that her chum was in the usual bounding spirits.

"Cricket, then! Heaps of time for both sides to bat. Morocco v. Grangemoor, Polly. And I'm for a picnic to-morrow—aren't you, dear? Take our lunches out—save the Delanes a lot of trouble."

"Lovely!" Polly agreed. She was herself again. "Oh, come on—race you down, Betty!"

Below stairs, they came upon Judy, all by herself in the hall. At first, Betty and Polly imagined that she was waiting for Dave, before going into tea. Then they heard Dave's voice from the dining-room, answering some jocular cry of Jack's.

Judy stepped quickly to speak to Betty and Polly.

"I wonder what you'll say," she said, in a low voice. "The others don't seem to mind. If we get a game after tea—"

"Cricket, Judy, yes!"

"Dave has been saying, could we invite Thelma Curtis to join us? He—he spoke first to me about it. Of course I said so far as I was concerned—yes. But—"

"We shall have to be introduced," Polly said airily. "She doesn't even know us yet!"

"I'm not at all inclined!" Betty exclaimed seriously. "Whatever made Dave ask it? So unlike him, Judy, to overlook—the way she's cut you!"

A kind of spasm seemed to pass across Judy's face.

"I know," she said huskily. "He's being very strange. But there is this about it, girls—although we're paying guests, we don't want to spoil the nice homey feeling that the Delanes give you."

"There's that," Betty nodded. "Oh, well, I don't mind if others don't. What about you, Polly?"

"Why should I mind, if Judy doesn't? Anything you like!" said Polly lightly.

The latest arrivals, Miss Drake and her widowed mother, were in evidence—an uninteresting pair. However, they had a well-to-do appearance, and Morcove knew what this might mean for the Delanes.

Half an hour later, Betty and Co. were keeping together in the hall, waiting for Thelma Curtis to come away from the dining-room. She had been alone again at her table, reading a magazine.

Now she came out and would have gone past all the chums, but Betty advanced with a pleasant:

"Excuse me—"

"Yes?" It was hauteur so overdone, Naomer, for one, had to rush away, cramming a handkerchief into her mouth.

"We think of picking up sides for cricket in the home meadow," Betty said cordially, "Would you like to join us?"

"Oh, I don't think so, thanks! I'm going to walk over the hill to meet my mother. She gets in on the six-thirty, and I can come back in the car with her."

"I see," said Betty. "In that case—"

The rest was a march-out, whilst Thelma Curtis flouted off in another direction.

"Sad, sad!" sighed Jack. "When I was so hoping to have her for a batting partner. But come on, boys," meaning the girls as well. "First pick to you, Betty, and I recommend Bobby Bloot. After the tea he's eaten, Bobby should be in great form. Anyhow, I don't want him!"

"I'll have Bobby if you'll let me have Jimmy?" the Morcove captain bargained sweetly.

"Nunno! You can have Dave, though. It's all right, he won't let you down, even though he is a bit down himself. Joke!"

"Oh, about me!" Dave came back to the group, after kicking a pebble about the path. "I hope you won't mind if I drop out—"

"What!" cried Judy. "Dave!"

"It isn't that I wouldn't enjoy a bit of cricket, only—"

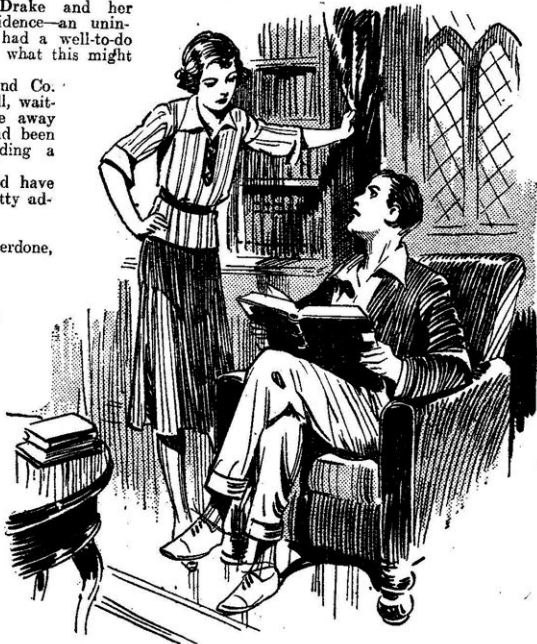
"Another attraction! My dear old chap," said Jack, slapping his chum soundly upon the shoulders, "don't mention it! We are delighted! Aren't we, boys? You push off, Dave. Don't you consider us! You just please yourself! You get your walk—over the hills and far away!"

"Oh, don't rot!" Dave protested sharply. He swung about and walked off, and some of the girls noticed that Jack was left tight-lipped. To see Jack, during the next few moments, was to wonder at his being the same Jack who was the jester of the party.

"Out to the field," he suggested, his voice gone very quiet. "And fix up sides there?"

"But I must get into lighter shoes," Polly said. "Shan't be a jiffy!"

There may have been others who had to change. If so, she was ahead of them as she ran indoors. It meant going upstairs to her bed-room, and alone there Polly could take herself in hand. No more of this dejection and irritability, spoiling



Judy found her brother in the library, looking at a photograph album. "Some of these are rather interesting," he commented. And he might have been out of doors, playing cricket!

others' enjoyment! You ought to know better!" she said to herself.

Then, doing a scamper along to the stairs that proclaimed a genuine recovery of spirits, she overtook Judy. That girl's face gave Polly a shock. "Oh, Judy dear—"

"I know," was the gulping response. "But I'm so unused to Dave's being like this. All day he's been so—so unsociable. We got here yesterday, as you know, and he was such a dear in every way then. But since first thing this morning—"

"Had that Curtis girl spoken to him before this morning?"

"No, Polly. At least, I don't think so. She hadn't taken any notice of me, anyway."

"What's her mother like, Judy?"

"Oh—dressed, affected, and a grumbler, too!"

"Judy, I'm going out," Polly suddenly announced fiercely. "Tell the others, will you, I shan't be at the cricket. I don't want to go and tell them. I shall flare up. I know I make scenes. Honestly, though, I've just been trying to take myself in hand, and I felt all right again. But now—"

And she was gone. Downstairs she whirled, ran through the drawing-room so as to get to the open air by a door leading out of that room into the garden, and then went panting up rising ground to where she could see a good deal of the surrounding country. Dave had started out, she knew. Where was

he—where? Which way had he gone? For she was going to find him—she WOULD find him!

Suddenly she saw him, making his way slowly up a hillside that basked in the westering sun.

He was alone, and Thelma Curtis certainly was not in sight to Polly. On the other hand, the girl might be in sight to him. Well, never mind if the two were gravitating to each other. Never mind if one did come upon them after a "chance" meeting!

"I'll have a row with her, too, that's all!" Polly raged, racing off again. "No, I won't!"

But she probably would, all the same.

First she had to do a downhill run, then she was at the foot of the slope that Dave had climbed. By the time she was hastening up the hillside he had gone over the brow of the hill.

In that direction, as the crow would fly, lay the railway station—miles away by road, but the cross-country walk meant a short cut to it. Thelma would go that way, most likely? Ugh!

Heaving for breath, Polly got to the summit with a rapidity born of grim determination. There she came upon a chalky mound that she supposed must be some ancient earthwork, but as she hurried close by it she realised that it was the estate reservoir.

A tiny wooden shed evidently housed the pumping-engine. But if that were so, then the engine was not working. The place was silent and deserted.

She felt only the most fleeting interest, for now Dave was in sight again—loitering about on the warm grass. Polly galloped across to him.

"Hallo!" he said. "I thought you were going to play cricket!"

"And do you know what I thought?" she flamed at him. "That you were not the fellow to do a thing like this! I thought that you could never, never be unkind to Judy, your sister, even though you might, by chance, hurt me!"

"Daggers Drawn"

DAVE'S dark brows drew together.

"So you're angry with me, Polly?"

"And if I am—haven't I the right to be? So I was going to play cricket," she rushed on. "Oh, I wasn't going to care if you didn't choose to be—sociable. But I found Judy so upset that I couldn't stand it! I made up my mind to come and find you, and simply fetch you back, Dave."

"And supposing I can't see my way to going back with you?"

"Then I shall stay with you, that's all," Polly said, at her grimmest. "You know what I am!"

"Of course I do, Polly. And you said you knew what I am—"

"I said I thought I knew!"

"So you do, Polly."

"Do I! When one gets a surprise packet like this to-day—one wonders!"

"It's all right, Polly—"

"Is it! Don't we arrange to have our holidays together, if possible, so as to be a nice happy band? But if one of us starts—"

"What you said about Judy," he broke in, as if he could not endure Polly's general upbraiding. "I promise you, Polly, I'll do my best when I get back to convince her. I haven't wanted to hurt her. I haven't wanted to hurt any of you—is it likely!" he added in a stung way.

"Come back with me, Dave, and say that yourself—to all of them."

"Sorry; but—"

"Oh, that's the extent of your regret! It isn't convenient to come back at once—"

"It really isn't, Polly."

"No! As Jack said, about the cricket—'another time'—"

Polly's rising anger took her a step nearer.

"We sunk our own feelings to ask that girl to join us at cricket, because you—you yourself had wanted it!"

"Yes, it was good of you—generous—"

"And this is how you repay us. When she won't play, then you won't, either! When she got the hint from her that she is going for a walk, you go off as well. Knowing she'd be hanging about for you—"

"That's not right, Polly—"

"It is, it is!"

"No, Polly."

"Then you are hanging about for her, anyhow, and that's just as bad—worse! Well, here it is!" Polly was able to comment, suddenly observing Thelma Curtis only a little way off. "And I'm not going away for her, either."

"You'd do far better, Polly—"

"Dave"—icily—"watch your own step, and I'll watch mine, thanks!"

A strained silence fell between them. Thelma Curtis was sauntering towards them. Her appearance had come about suddenly because that chalk mound had, so far, screened her.

Hands in the pockets of her light sports jacket, she came strolling up with that mincing step which was a bad imitation of the high step of inborn dignity.

"Hallo!" she smiled to Dave, when within speaking distance. "This isn't where the cricket is to be?"

"No," Dave laughed.

She side-glanced Polly, who was frowning at the distant view.

"I've got as far as this," Thelma remarked lazily. "Now the station, right over there, looks a bit too far for me. I don't think I shall go to meet mother, after all."

"Will you come down to the Manor at once, then," Dave eagerly suggested, "and play with the others? Still time."

"Oh, I don't think so. I'll just stay around for a bit enjoying the view. It's about all one gets for one's money at the hotel. Hotel! Awful place."

"Then I wonder you stay!"

"Pardon?"

"I say," Polly cried furiously, "I wonder you and your mother stay! Other people find it nice enough."

"They haven't been here long enough to judge."

"Well, if you and your mother have, and you don't like the place, why stay?"

"I might ask you that, I think," Thelma retorted, looking from Polly to Dave, and then back to Polly. "Why stay?" And she laughed.

Dave, who had seemed to await Thelma's answer with keen interest, now spoke appeasingly.

"Don't you stay, Polly. I'm sure you'll enjoy it far better on the cricket field. You're not so keen on scenery as—"

"I'm not going back to see your sister looking upset."

"Oh, it's only his sister you are troubled about?" smiled Thelma.

"Why, what do you think?"

"I thought it might be at least six for yourself and half a dozen for her!"

"Oh, don't you two start rowing," Dave interposed. "Shall we go back, Thelma?"

"I don't mind"—sweetly. "Yes, let's. So that this girl can have her cricket after all."

Nasty, that. It implied that Polly's stubborn intention to remain if Dave remained was so much cutting off the nose to spite the face.

They went back, the three of them. So Polly, at any rate, had achieved part of her objective. But not all. For Dave, back at the Manor, did not take a hand on the cricket field.

He showed himself there, being received with loud and facetious cheers. He spoke a few words to Judy, who was waiting to go in, being on the side then batting. Then he drifted away.

"More clock golf, I suppose," Helen Craig commented tartly. "Really, he is—"

But when Judy, after going in to bat and getting out first ball, went off to find Dave, she discovered him in the former library of the great house, which had now become a reading-room.

"What's the book, Dave dear?"

"Oh, only an old album of photographs, Judy. Some of them go back a number of years—rather interesting."

When he might have been out in the evening sunshine, playing cricket!

Judy waited until she had got outside the room, leaving him to himself again. Then her head drooped in fresh disappointment, and she fetched a long sigh.

WHEN Dave had looked through the old album right to the last folio, he turned back to the middle of the unwieldy volume.

The photographs could all be slipped out from the cardboard mounts that formed the book.

Glancing first to the door to see that it was shut, and then to the windows, as if to see that no one was peering in, Dave slipped one photograph from the album and put it away in his breast-pocket.

The Night Alarm

MIDNIGHT silence brooded over Cromlech Manor.

In all the fifteen bed-rooms it could be taken for granted that the occupants were fast asleep.

But now, without there having been the slightest warning, a sudden terrific commotion took place. Crash! Thud! Wumph! And again—crash!

"Polly, did you hear that?"

"Gosh, Betty, did I hear it!"

Sharply awakened, the two girls in this particular bed-room were sitting up in bed, their hearts pounding.

"But what could it have been, Polly?"

"Goodness knows! Not a burglar?"

"No. Explosion is more like what it—Hark, that's Naomer, next door, yelling out! And Paula, who shares with her—hear her squealing?"

Betty was skipping out of bed no quicker than the madcap. The switches were over by the door. But when Betty clicked on one of them no light came.

She tried another, and still the room remained in darkness.

"Oh, I say, Polly; nice thing! The light's gone wrong!"

"Has it? But we've a candle and matches. Got 'em!" came Polly's excited cry in the darkness.

A match spurted into flame, and she lighted the candle.

"Perhaps the lights are wrong all over the house," Betty said, flinging on a dressing-gown whilst thrusting her feet into bed-room slippers.

"Then it's the electric light system that has blown up!" Polly hazarded. "Hear the row that everybody is—"

Then their bed-room door flew open and Naomer stood revealed by the pale candlelight, very scared and pathetic.

"Bekas—queek, queek!" she squeaked. "Ooo, queek, come to our room, queek!"

"Why, what, Naomer—what? Why?"

"Bekas all ze ceiling has come down on top of us!"

"It has? Never!" gasped Betty.

Seizing the candle, she hurried out of this room with Polly. A hubbub of wondering talk was going on everywhere on this upper floor of the age-old house. But the two chums, with their dusky friend scuttling close upon their heels, seemed to hear most distinctly, amidst the babel of voices, a kitten-like miaowing.

Then they were at the threshold of the bed-room occupied by Naomer and Paula; and the mewling sound proved to be Paula's dismally repeated: "Ow! Ow! Ow!"

Betty advanced into the room, holding the candle high.

"Paula!"

"Oh, geals, geals, healp!" wailed Morcove's beloved duffer, sitting up in bed with her knees high. "I—I'm buried alive, bai Jove! Ow, gwacious, is that you, Betty deah? Look at me! Healp!"

"Bekas ze whole zing came down wallop, and got me, too!" shrilled Naomer. "Look up zere! And look at my bed, queek! What ze diggings!"

"Ow, gwacious, geals; tewvible!" wailed Paula, giving a sudden flounce that sent quantities of fallen mortar off the bedclothes. "It's an earthquake!"

"Gosh, Betty, just look up there!"

Quite half the ceiling had fallen, in great plates of mortar. Where that much of the ceiling had been there was now a black void, except for some dangling laths and one or two dark oak joists.

"How very funny," Polly spluttered, then turned round, as Betty was doing, to answer anxious cries from the sudden crowd that filled the doorway.

"No, no one hurt! It's only the ceiling!"

"What? Oh! Oh, good gracious!"

Foremost in the crowd were the other Morcove girls. Like Betty and Polly, they had been sleeping in bed-rooms close to the one which this unpleasant disturbance had arisen. But behind Pam and the rest, all in their hastily donned dressing-gowns, were most of the other guests, old and young alike.

"Can we do anything?" called out Jack.

"You can fetch dustpans and brooms if you like," his sister gaily answered. "Ha, ha, ha! I can't help laughing. Paula thought it was an earthquake!"

"Bai Jove, and so would you have, Polly deah, if you had been underneath! Extwaordinary occuwnence, anyhow—like the end of the world, yes, wather!"

Then Mrs. Delane came rushing upon the scene. "Dear, dear! Oh, you poor things! But you are all right?"

"Quite all wight, yes, wather, Mrs. Delane, so pway don't wowwy! My hair is wather gwitty, bai Jove; otherwise—"

"And I have eggscaped, too, Mrs. Delane," Naomer hastened to assure the hostess of Cromlech Manor. "Only eet has left me rather thirsty."

"You shall have something, dear, before you go to sleep again. This room!"

"We'll have them in with us, Mrs. Delane," Betty offered blithely. "Won't that be best—and leave all the clearing up until the morning?"

"That's good of you, dear. Mr. Delane has gone to see why the lights won't come on anywhere. Really, this is most unfortunate," Dolly's mother grieved. "First night in the house for

so many of you. Everybody disturbed—oh, dear, oh, dear!”

But the juniors soon had her laughing along with themselves. Their goodwill, as well as their sense of humour, made them see only the comic side to the midnight alarm. Morcove could not help noticing, however, that the grown-up guests, speedily retiring to their different bed-rooms, were keeping their opinions to themselves.

“I say, Judy,” whispered Pam presently, “I hope those people won’t be clearing out in the morning as a result of all this?”

“You mean the other guests? Just what I was thinking.”

Pam and Judy, who shared a bed-room, were back in bed by now. The whole house had hushed down once more; but if these two girls were soon to get to sleep they would have to stop the moonlight from flooding in upon them. It had just worked round to their window.

It was Pam who got out of bed again, realising that curtains would have to be drawn closer. She remained a good while at the window; but Judy did not think anything of this, as her chum was likely to come under the spell of that lovely countryside, seen in the silvery radiance of the moon.

Then, suddenly:

“Judy,” came the whisper, “rather strange!”

“What is, Pam?”

“Two people have slipped out of doors, and I’m sure it is Thelma Curtis and her mother. Thelma went first.”

“Really?”

Flinging back the bedclothes, Judy came foot to floor, and was next moment beside Pam at the window. Its old-fashioned casement was set wide open.

“They have gone round behind some of the outbuildings, Judy. Be careful not to put your head too far out, in case they suddenly come back and see you,” Pam breathed. “The old coach-houses that serve as garages are that way.”

“The garages,” Judy echoed faintly. “And they have their own car, haven’t they?”

“Yes. Doll mentioned that. Mrs. Curtis didn’t use the car to-day. It was out of order, I understand.”

“Well, they can’t be going to tinker with it at a time like this,” Judy said under her breath quite seriously. “Goodness, Pam, I—I suppose they are not going off now in secret?”

“You mean—leaving their bill unpaid? It’s funny you should say that, Judy, for they’ve been on monthly terms, and must owe for several weeks by now.”

For several seconds the two girls looked at each other in the moonlight.

“Would it be why they have stayed on for as long as they have, although they haven’t liked the place?” Judy further pondered aloud. “Board and lodging for several weeks, and then—a moonlight flitting!”

“It will be a cruel loss to the Delanes, Judy, if there is anything like that afoot,” Pam muttered. “I suppose there are people capable of—bilked, don’t they call it? And you’ve certainly hit the nail on the head; they’ve stayed, although they have been all grumbles.”

“Hark! Is that a car starting up?”

“No, dear; that’s the electric light plant. Mr. Delane must have got it to work again.”

“Anyway, Pam, shall we wait here to listen in case a car does start up?”

“Or shall we put on something and creep down? Why not do that?” Pam serenely suggested.

“Judy, I’m in the mood to put a spoke in their

wheel if there is any idea of diddling the Delanes. Yes, I shall go down.”

“Then I shall come, too,” whispered Judy.

CLOSE in against a wall of one of the old outbuildings, where there was shelter from the moonlight, two fully-dressed figures came to a standstill. Thelma Curtis and her mother!

“I hope it is all right, Thelma,” the whisperer passed. “It was the thing to do if possible—strike whilst the iron is hot.”

“And it is possible, mother,” was spoken just as softly. “What’s more, I don’t believe we’d have a chance now, except by night. All those kids of schoolgirls, not to mention the boys—they’ll be everywhere about the place by day.”

“Yet I don’t like keeping you out of bed like this, Thelma. I should be able to do the thing by myself.”

“But I’m enjoying it all, really I am!” And now Thelma Curtis laughed very softly. “The way that ceiling came down just now—at the very right time! And they’ll never suspect—”

“If ever they do, Thelma, then the game will be up,” her mother hoarsely whispered. “But you’re showing very good sense—plenty of resourcefulness, I must say. I give you full credit for bringing off that idea. Well, you know what we stand to gain, if only we can succeed, one way and another. It will be a great day for us, Thelma, when the Delanes have to close down.”

“Mother, let me go up the hill alone and do the trick at their pumping-station—I wish you would,” Thelma pleaded in guarded tones. “I’ve looked at the place by daylight, and I know how. Single-handed—”

“Whilst I stay here?” murmured Mrs. Curtis, inclining to her daughter’s suggestion. “So that if anybody should come out of doors, I am merely seeing to the car, having made up my mind to go away first thing in the morning; disgusted with a place where the ceilings come down and the lights go wrong! But, Thelma, won’t you feel nervous, going up to the top of that lonely hill at dead of night?”

“Not a bit! So I’m off, mother”—promptly gliding away. “Shall come back to you here, say, in an hour’s time at most.”

“Very well, then.”

Five seconds after this, and Mrs. Curtis would have given a good deal to be able to recall her daughter; either that, or flit after her. But it was too late!

Thelma, in those few seconds, had silently fluttered away upon her mysterious errand, and her mother dare not voice a warning word, dare not move an inch for fear of betraying herself.

Shadowy figures, two of them, coming, silently, warily, in this direction, from a side door of the Manor House. Two of those schoolgirls, as Mrs. Curtis could tell.

The moonlight shimmered upon them when they drew clear of the house walls.

Then, having padded across an open space, they were amongst the range of outbuildings where she, it seemed, must play hide-and-seek with them—if she could!

“WHY, goodness, Pam—look!”

“Where, Judy, where?”

“There!”

To Pam’s surprise, her chum’s pointing finger did not indicate any part of the immediate surroundings, where so much deep shadow blotched the moonlit scene.

Judy was pointing away to a moon-blanching hillside, observable between one lot of outbuildings and another.

On that bare sweep of steep downland a diminu-

tive figure was discernible, going uphill. There was only that one figure, and Pam, in the instant that she discerned it, said under her breath: "That's the girl, Judy. Where's her mother, then?"

"Surely they must have both gone that way? Though what it means now I just can't imagine! I don't know of anything over there on the hills, Pam, that could—yes, what?" as a slight gasp escaped Pam.

She did not at once answer, but remained in a startled attitude, peering steadily.

"Judy," at last, "I've just glimpsed a second figure, but I can't see it now."

"Her mother?"

"Must have been! Seemed to be going Thelma's way, anyhow, although following a different course—more to the left. What it means I suppose they are to meet at some appointed spot, up there on the hills."

"But, Pam, why? What on earth are they about?"

"If we follow—and why shouldn't we? So long as you feel as I do, Judy, that we have the right?"

"Oh, no question!"

The two girls could not have communed in deeper whispers than they had kept to all along. Now, even the whispering ceased as they crept on, traversing the alleyway between the two blocks of farm buildings and so emerging upon open grassland.

The ground rose before them at once. That hillside up which Thelma had gone began to rise from just behind the buildings. Not a tree grew on the slope, not so much as a clump of hawthorn even, that would have offered a blot of shadow in the bright moonlight.

There was a fence, partitioning the grassy slope, and the best Pam and Judy could do was to keep close to this fence, stooping low as they climbed the smooth hill.

"I believe now that the second figure I saw, Judy, did as we are doing—took to the fence for shelter," was Pam's whisper presently.

"Then she is not far ahead of us, most likely! It's not so easy to see clearly, Pam, in spite of the moonlight."

"No; a bit misty. That's the fine weather we're having. To-morrow, I imagine, will be a glorious—st!" Pam abruptly checked, and pulled her chum to a standstill. "There's someone, Judy—ahead of us, stooping by the fence, as we are doing!"

"I can see—yes!" breathed Judy. "But, Pam!" she gasped, next moment. "That's not Mrs. Curtis!"

"No!"

"It's my brother, I do believe!"

"It is Dave," Pam agreed, nodding.

And once again the two girls looked at each other, feeling totally mystified.

Who Goes There?

THELMA CURTIS started to smile exultantly as she came alone to that small building at the very summit of the hill, where the Manor House had its engine for pumping the water supply.

Now! Now, at this dead time of night, she could do the deed that had been planned for several hours ago. She had been balked then—prevented by that tiresome meeting with Dave Cardew and Polly Linton, when she had thought they would be taking part in the game of cricket.

Nice fellow, that Dave. She, Thelma, liked to have him with her; but he had been badly in the way just then. Now, however—

Standing in a patch of shadow cast by one of the shed walls, she peered downhill in the direction of the Manor.

No, nothing to be seen to cause her alarm.



"Tell your mother I wish to have my bill," the lady commanded Dolly.
"My daughter and I are leaving—at once!"

And so she really was entitled to feel exultant. The thing was as good as done!

She had no intention of entering the tiny pumping-house. Mere tampering with the machinery would not suffice. Damage done on those lines could easily be rectified, whilst leaving room for wilful injury to be suspected. The water-reservoir itself—that was where her work lay, to-night!

And how easy the task was going to be, too. A matter of a few minutes, and then the Manor House would be quite cut off for water. As soon as the house tanks were exhausted, they would be at their wits' ends.

Thelma grinned.

"I'd like to know who the guests are who will stay at a place where the water-supply has broken down!" So she was saying to herself. "And if the Delanes don't keep their guests, they are going to be in queer street in no time. Mother and I know that, for a cert!"

She left the shadowy wall to move towards the water-reservoir. It was some twenty yards from the pumping-shed—an uncovered reservoir, consisting of one huge iron tank, as she knew, banked round with chalk. All she would have to do would be to climb one of the steep banks, on hands and knees, and then—

What was that, though? A faint cough, as from someone close at hand! And not her mother either—oh, good gracious! More like the cough a boy might give! And so—but this was terrible! Was she going to find that HE was here again, just when, once again, she had been going to do—the deed.

There had been only a second for these unnerving fears to seize the guilty-minded girl, and then she beheld him slowly and calmly sauntering towards her!

"Is that you, Thelma Curtis? I thought I saw someone—"

"Oh—er—and it's you, Dave Cardew! Well—fancy! She managed to laugh, but only flustered. "Whatever brings you out at this time of night!"

"What brings you?" he retorted, smiling calmly.

"Oh, I—I—I couldn't get to sleep again, after that upset over the fallen ceiling. You know how it is, when you are awakened by a commotion. So I stood at my window for a time, and then—such a lovely night, this moonlight, you know!"

He nodded, as if completely satisfied with her lying explanation.

"But I fancy, Thelma, your mother is out looking for you—"

"She is?"

He nodded again.

"Yes"—crisply. "Perhaps she was standing at her window, too! As for me, I couldn't sleep either," was all the explanation he troubled to offer. As far as it went, it was perfectly truthful. "So here we are, both of us—how funny!" she tittered. "But I shall go back now, of course. Er—will you come with me? I mean—er—we can both explain then, to mother. I expect she will be relieved that you happened to be about, for she may consider I did a foolish thing in—"

The rest never came. Lips that had emitted such plausible words now formed a round O of fresh amazement and dismay. The girl's eyes enlarged as they beheld a couple of youthful figures approaching with quick, determined steps.

Then Dave, realising how she was staring past him like that, turned round to see what was happening behind him.

If any shock of surprise or alarm went through

him, it did not leave him visibly unnerved. But then, he was a strong-nerved fellow.

"Why, it's my sister—and one of her school chums," he remarked promptly. "Hallo, Judy—and Pam, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"How—how very funny this is!" Thelma tittered again. "Oh, this is a scream, really! He, he, he! How many more people are out of bed to-night?"

"We only know of one person," Pam said calmly, "your mother, Thelma Curtis!"

"Oh, yes! Er—Dave, here, has just been telling me! Er—is mother close at hand?"

"The last we saw of her," Judy stated, "she was following you across one of the stable-yards. But that was some little while ago. Well, Dave?"

"None of us ought to be here, and that's a fact," he said, with a short laugh. "So let's get back together."

"Together!"

"Why not?"

Why not? Pam marvelled how he could have answered his sister so. She saw Judy's face in the moonlight, when the walk downhill had commenced. It was pale and drawn-looking. Dave was most inclined to converse with her—Judy—but she gave him no encouragement.

Back at the Manor, where Mrs. Curtis suddenly appeared to them all, with every sign of anxiety giving place to relief, Judy would not stay to hear what her brother and Thelma might have to say.

There was a look for Pam from Judy that said: "Let's get indoors!" and Pam was by no means reluctant to act on that suggestion.

After all, however, Judy was to have word with her brother before retiring again. She waited about on an upper landing, leaving Pam to go on in advance to their bed-room.

Dave was coming upstairs now, as Judy could tell, whilst Mrs. Curtis and her daughter delayed below, engaged in whispered talk.

Moonlight, flooding in at the landing window, showed Dave his sister's face clearly as she turned round to him when he reached the landing. Perhaps the misery in her looks distressed him, for he exclaimed earnestly:

"I'm sorry, Judy. But you mustn't worry or grieve."

"Why," she asked faintly, "did you go out of doors?"

"Only because I knew that Thelma and her mother had gone out. That's all."

"Is that all?"

And she passed on, treading silently back to her room, never imagining how much there would prove to have been some day in that "all" of his.

Their Fears Come True

"POLLY, they're going!"

"Going? Who—what d'you mean?"

And Polly Linton, aware of brilliant morning sunshine pouring in at the bed-room window, stretched and yawned after sitting up in bed.

"It's a bad look-out for the Delanes, Polly darling. That nice, elderly couple are leaving as soon as they've had brekker."

"Leaving? But they were going to stay for—"

"I know; but now they've changed their minds. That row in the night did it. And they didn't like the lights going out of order, either."

"Just because a ceiling came down. Pooh!"

"Sh! Paula's still asleep, I see, and Naomer, too," Betty softly commented, glancing across to the bed with which the two girls in question had had to make do for the latter half of the night. "We won't talk now, Polly. I'm off downstairs again."

Morcove's Fourth Form captain had taken care not to disturb any of her room-mates whilst washing and dressing a quarter of an hour ago. Nor would she have come running back to the bedroom a minute since, only that news about the intended departure of guests had seemed to be something that she must impart to Polly, at any rate, at once. Such a bad business for the Delanes!

Dolly was downstairs and busy about some self-appointed duties, Betty knew. There had been a good deal of sleeping on this morning—not surprising. But Betty was aware that this applied only to her Morcove chums.

The boys were already out of doors—"Wanting to make themselves useful to dad, I fancy," Dolly had admirably remarked to Betty. "It is good of them!"

Now Betty came upon Dolly again, still briskly dusting the hall.

"I can very well do that, Dolly dear, so let me

"The idea! Oh, no!" smiled the homely one, turning a chair askant to rub it with the polishing cloth. "Paying guests—"

"Use that word again!" Betty playfully threatened. "You know very well that we're all here as friends. And so—"

There was a sudden interruption—a nasty one.

"Girl! Where's your mother, girl?"

"Oh—er—good-morning, Mrs. Drake!"

For this was the vinegary widow whom Dolly had been called upon to answer. The tall, sour-looking woman had come downstairs in a dressing-gown.

"Tell your mother I wish to have my bill at breakfast-time. My daughter and I are going!"

"Leaving, madam?"

Poor Dolly! She looked horrified.

"Yes. As soon as we have had breakfast," came the acid reply. "After last night, we do not care to stay another day even. We don't want ceilings to come down on our heads! And no electric light, just when an emergency calls for it!"

But this was not the sum total of the grievance. After turning back to the stairs, the vinegary lady flung a further remark to both girls over a shoulder.

"And a dead rat in our bed-room cupboard! The place," Mrs. Drake said loudly, returning upstairs to make her toilette, "is disgraceful! An imposition to offer it as fit for decent people!"

And, stressing the indignation, there followed the violent slamming of a bed-room door.

Below in the hall Dolly righted the chair, dropped the duster, and then suddenly put up both hands to her drooping face. She sobbed as if her young heart were broken.

"Hush! Oh, Dolly darling, don't—don't!" Betty lovingly implored. "Don't cry, dear! I know it is upsetting—a cruel disappointment. But—"

"All four of them!" Dolly wept. "Leaving!"

"Yes, dear, but—others will come. And we're here, and we just love it, Dolly!"

"You—you're all different," the tearful voice went on. "You'd put up with anything for love of me and my parents. But where they are strangers who are guests—they go. They go like this, and after a single night!"

Dolly wiped her eyes, then moved, so that the hand that had been patting her comfortingly dropped away from her shoulders.

"I must find mother and tell her," she faltered. "She's in the kitchen—they're having trouble with the range. Mother says it is as if something had gone wrong with it in the night."

"Cheer up, Dolly darling. Things will go quite smoothly after a while."

Betty had no sooner said that, in the act of returning upstairs, than she looked up and saw Thelma Curtis descending.

"Oh, good-morning!" that girl gushed. "Lovely morning, isn't it? But what's Dolly Delane looking so down about? Been crying, hasn't she?"

"It is enough to make her cry!" Betty exclaimed sadly. "She's just heard that four of the guests are leaving at once, when it was hoped that they would like the place and stay on. Are you and your mother also leaving, perhaps?"

"Oh, no!"

Betty felt inclined to let Thelma see a grimace of displeasure. To the Morcove captain it certainly seemed a pity that Mrs. Curtis and her daughter were not going. After all, they would only be staying on to grumble, grumble—and run up a bill. Not much in, all that for the Delanes.

The old habit of liking to tell Polly and the others everything took Betty upstairs again. She came to one bed-room door that was ajar, and heard Polly in talk with Pam and Judy, so she turned in there.

"Hallo, Betty!" said Pam, this being the first they had seen of each other this morning. "Did we hear that Drake woman making a row just now—sort of complaining?"

"Yes," Betty sighed ruefully. "She and her daughter are leaving, as well as that other couple."

"Oh, dear!" Judy murmured feelingly. "How rotten for the Delanes!"

"Beastly," Betty nodded glumly. "And it has made poor Doll feel so low spirited one doesn't know how to comfort her."

"Do the boys know?" asked Pam. "They're all down, aren't they?"

"They're out and about somewhere. I don't suppose they know yet. They'll feel as sorry as we do about it all."

"And the Curtises?" Judy asked uncomfortably.

"Oh, they're staying on—more's the pity," Betty shrugged. "I should think the Delanes would be all the better without them."

"But think," said Polly, dryly, "how Dave would miss Thelma Curtis!"

"Oh, that's enough!" was Judy's strung-up cry. "Now you be quiet, Polly—please."

Polly, still in a dressing-gown, and with a towel over one arm, had been glancing out of the window. Now, after taking a first step or two in the direction of the door, she stood arrested by that protest from Judy, who was looking over-wrought.

"I'm his sister, remember, Polly. I'm sorry I spoke like that, but—"

"I do remember it, Judy; it's only Dave who seems to be forgetting. Oh, dash!" Morcove's forehead stamped. "And now, of course, I'm being unkind. All right, I won't even say what's true."

"Was it true, Polly, to say—"

"Yes, Judy, it was!" the madcap came back a step to insist violently. "I said that Dave would miss that Curtis girl if she went away—and so he would! Look out there and see him now."

"With her?"

"No, but gazing at her photograph—ha, ha, ha!" Polly laughed wildly. "It isn't enough that he must be with her every possible moment. He must have her photograph to gaze at now, like a stupid—"

"Stop!" Judy panted. "You don't know that it was her photograph!"

"Whose else would it be? Can he look at anyone else when she's about? Does he care—does he care about anything so long as that girl is—"

"You've got to stop," Judy again struck in. "Stop, I tell you—"

"Yes, Polly," Betty interposed. "Come now."

"Oh, all right! But—"

"Besides, I've an idea!" Betty rushed on, with a sudden joyfulness that rendered them spell-bound. "We have done something for the Delanes by coming here as paying guests. But it's not enough girls—not nearly. We must get hold of other guests for them; get them somehow, and get so many that we'll have to give up half our rooms to them at the finish!"

"If only we could do that somehow," Pam said eagerly. "You say you've an idea, Betty. What is it, then?"

"I've a second idea—even better than the first," was Betty's jubilant answer. "But we'll carry out both—we will. My first idea was simply to post off an ad. to one of the big dailies at our own expense."

"Unbeknown to the Delanes!" Pam nodded. "Splendid."

"Guests at Charming Country Hotel wish to recommend it in every way, etc., etc.," Polly rattled off gaily. "You're the one, Betty. Whilst I'm being a cat, and only upsetting Judy—"

"Judy knows you," laughed Morcove's captain. "But listen again, girls. Tess is the artist. She has her sketching materials with her. My second idea; put a small hoarding beside the main road on the Manor House land, getting Mr. Delane's permish, of course."

"You mean—and get Tess to paint an attractive advertisement?" jerked out Judy. "Oh! Tess, dear, do you hear this?"

"In oils," nodded Tess, who had quietly entered along with others during the recent burst of talk. "Right-ho! You give me the hoarding—any size you like—"

"As beeg as ze side of a house!" shrilled Naomer, who was another greatly taken with the bright idea. "Showing ze dining-room, with dinner on ze table—gorjus! Bekas underneath you could say: 'Second helpings, free!'"

"Haw, haw, haw!" chortled Paula. "But weally geals, it's a bwiliant inspawtion, yee, wather, bai Jove! The boys can ewect the hoarding—"

"Why should the boys erect it?" snorted Polly. "Can't we girls?—I mayn't be able to paint, but I can use a hammer and a saw. I want to begin—now!"

"Then come on," cried Betty. "Although you had better get dressed first, Polly!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come on," Betty cried again, to those who were ready to dash downstairs with her. "And as soon as we've had breakfast we will go ahead."

"Yes, queek; come on, everybody!"

And Morcove, never so happy as when it was doing for others, was happy now—convinced that by its own big drive for more guests, Cromlech Manor could be saved!

[THE END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.]

His Friendship a Mockery

WHY is Dave Cardew behaving so strangely—seeming not to care that he is causing his sister and the other members of the holiday party such concern? Is there a motive for his strange actions? Has he some secret that he cannot confide even in his best chums?

Next Tuesday's fine long complete Morcove holiday tale reveals further exciting developments in the mystery which is puzzling Betty and Co. Do not on any account miss this powerful story, which is entitled:



MORCOVE'S
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