

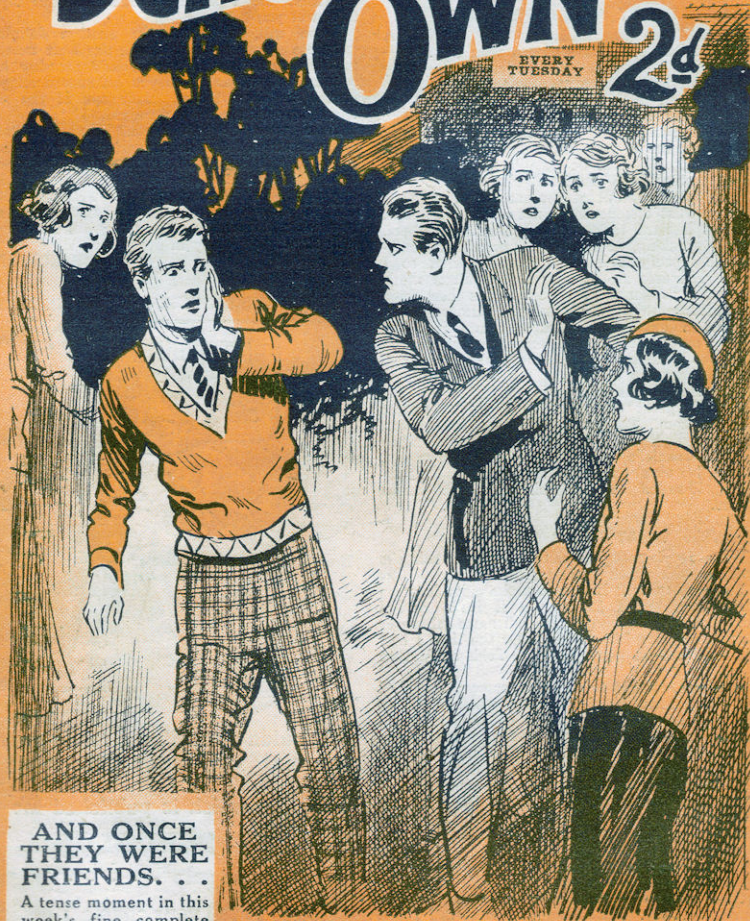
"Disappointed in Dave!" Exciting Complete Morcove
Holiday Story Within

The SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN

No. 689. Vol. 27.
Week ending
APRIL 21st, 1934.

EVERY
TUESDAY

2d



**AND ONCE
THEY WERE
FRIENDS. . .**

A tense moment in this
week's fine complete
Morcove holiday story.

FOUR FINE STORIES IN THIS NUMBER

MARJORIE STANTON'S *Fine Complete Story—***DISAPPOINTED in DAVE!**

The Morcove and Grangemoor Chums in An Eventful Holiday Drama

DAVE CARDEW is proving a mystery. None of the Morcove-Grangemoor holiday party can understand his behaviour, which, besides casting a gloom upon the gaiety of the holiday, is causing his sister such concern. And, to crown all, Dave himself seems not to care what happens—so long as he can be with Thelma Curtis.

Off For An Outing

POLLY LINTON, in the raftered kitchen of Cromlech Manor, was cutting bread-and-butter as fast as she could do so.

She, in term-time the madcap of Morcove School, had one corner of the massive kitchen table all to herself.

At another corner stood Betty Barton, slicing away at a cooked ham with that efficiency in all things which had made her captain of her Form.

Then there was Naomer Nakara, showing tremendous interest in the sandwich-making. Naomer had already sampled one, declaring it to be "gorjus!"

Betty suddenly glanced to the kitchen window; Polly as suddenly glanced at the clock.

"Keeping fine!" said Betty.

"And we ought to be away—all of us—by half-past eleven," was Polly's gratified rejoinder. "Should think the others will be back any minute now."

"Yes. But what a shame it was: I can't get over it," Betty murmured. "You wouldn't think anybody could be so mean as to do such a thing."

"Oh, spite will account for anything," Polly grimaced.

These remarks concerned a very exasperating occurrence that had put the holiday-making chums of Study 12 to a great deal of trouble, since first thing this morning.

Yesterday they had all worked hard to make and erect a small roadside notice-board, about a mile from Cromlech Manor, advertising the attractions of the place, now that it was being run as a country hotel.

Betty and Co. had done this out of goodwill towards the parents of Dolly Delane, a Morcove girl, like themselves, whose parents had been forced to convert the ancient manor into the guest-house.

Tess Trelawney, the born artist of the "chum-mery," had adorned the small hoarding with a

really fine pictorial sign. When she knocked off, late last evening, only the finishing touches remained to be done.

Then, in the night, some evilly disposed person had wrought havoc with the signboard whilst the paint was still wet.

"Think I've cut enough, Betty dear?"

"Well, we're a pretty big party, Polly!"

"And there's always the Blood boy's appetite to think of—as well as Naomer's!"

So Polly went to work upon the loaf afresh.

"Fat lot of profit the Delanes will make out of those two," she mock-grimly commented. "In fact, Betty, the way we're being fed, and the little that is going to be charged—"

"I know! But there it is; if you say anything," Betty smiled, "the Delanes simply argue that we're all here as friends of theirs."

The madcap nodded.

"They're so kind; but just the right spirit of hospitality. This place, Betty, would go with a bang, if only it were better known. And—if only, when strangers did turn up, things didn't go all wrong somehow. All those people who have come, since we've been here, and have gone off again—almost at once, you might say!"

"Mrs. Curtis and her daughter—the only two who do stay on!"

"Yes—just the two who would be better gone,"

Polly rejoined, with one of her fiercest looks.

"Now, Betty, I think I shall let it go at that!"

The bread knife clacked down. Polly took up the remainder of a loaf and went to drop it back in the earthenware bread-pan, in the larder. One step past the threshold of that capacious store-room, and she gave an explosive:

"I thought so! Ugh, you greedy—"

"Not ze bit of eet, Polly. Bekas, I am only—"

"Only up the housemaid's steps, sampling the jams, Betty," the madcap called kitchenwards. "This kid is simply scoffing Mrs. Delane's jams by the hundredweight!"

"Ooo, what fibs! Bekas—just a taster,"

Naomer was protesting, whilst she conveyed another spoonful towards her mouth, when Polly snatched the spoon away and brought the laden end of it lightly down upon her—Naomer's—head. Jam and all!

"Out of here, kid!"

"What ze diggings—"

"Out-side!"

"No, bekas—"

Naomer would have been in a better position for argument if she had not been halfway up the housemaid's steps. Polly shook them, and promptly the dusky one came toppling down.

There was, however, most artful retaliation by Naomer. She did not topple off the steps without managing to slam the jammy crown of her head full against Polly's chest.

"And serve you right, Polly."

After chasing the imp out of sight, the madcap came back.

"I'll have to go up to my room and make myself what Paula calls 'respectable,' Betty."

"I shall follow in a minute."

At this instant, a medley of youthful voices came from out of doors. When Polly had scampered as far as the hall, to go upstairs, she glanced through a front window and saw some half-dozen boys and girls coming towards the house. But she would not wait to have word with them.

Their joyous demeanour assured her that all was well. They, who had been down the road

to repair the damage done to the boarding, had finished the job. So now they were free to set off for that picnic.

She ran upstairs and would have gone with her usual whirlwind speed along the bed-room corridor to her room, but somebody, meeting her, voiced a checking remark.

It was handsome Mrs. Curtis.

"Oh, I wanted to ask one of you girls," she said, with a sweet smile that was without the desired effect upon Polly. "I wonder if Thelma might come with you all, for the picnic?"

"Come with us?" Good excuse had Polly for looking surprised as well as disagreeable. Thelma Curtis had been most unfriendly to all of them excepting Dave, the brother of Judy Cardew.

What was more, the chums now even suspected Thelma of being that unknown person who had played such a disgraceful trick upon the notice-board, during the night.

"My daughter, you know, is shy—"

"Is she?" Polly thought.

"But I am sure she would like to join you, and it would be good for her."

"Mrs. Curtis, you must ask Betty Barton about that," Polly stated curtly. "Betty is our captain at school. It is the sort of thing for her to decide."

And, that said, Polly marched on, never doubting that Betty would refuse.

Polly Is Cross

"I SAY, Polly dear! Do you mind if Thelma Curtis comes with us?"

The madcap faced round.

"What!"

"The others are all willing."

"They are?" In greater amazement than ever, Polly Linton stared at her best of chums, who was heeling the bed-room door shut.

"Yes, dear. Just fancy Mrs. Curtis having the cheek to ask it! At first, I felt inclined to say 'No.'"

"Pity you didn't, I think!"

"Then you're wild, Polly, that I have said 'Yes'! I'm sorry," said Betty. "I consulted Pam and others who were on hand downstairs before deciding. But you were up here, and there was no time to lose—and Mrs. Curtis had said you would like it, if I would agree."

"Oh, Mrs. Curtis said that, did she?"

"I hardly believed it," Betty smiled. "But look here, dear; it's like this: Not one of us can possibly want Thelma for the sake of her company. Better if she and her mother were a thousand miles from Cromlech Manor. Only, we know this, Polly: Her coming with us will mean that Dave, for once, will come along."

"Dash!" Polly stamped; but that, perhaps, was because the comb she was using would not run smoothly through her hair. She grimaced as she tugged. "Oh, of course, Betty, if we are to have the girl, for the sake of Dave—"

"But that isn't so, Polly. It's all really for the sake of Judy; quite a different matter. We put up with Thelma so that Dave will be with us, so that his sister will be happy. As she certainly hasn't been, so far, these hols," Betty finished with a sigh.

"Right-ho!"

"That sounds—"

"Oh, I can't help it if it does!" Polly flared out. "I'm fed up! Now the picnic is to be spoiled for all of us by that blessed Curtis girl! I won't go!"

"Polly dear—"

"I wish I could ask for MY bill, and pack up—I do! Nothing but annoyance—sickening upsets, spoiling our holiday! What does Jack say about this latest?" Jack was her brother.

"He and Jimmy Cherrol, and Bobby Blood—they all feel that it is worth while for Judy's sake."

"So that I, as usual, am the only one to be—to be mean enough—"

"Polly, you're not to call yourself such names!"

"But I am—a cat! I feel I could scratch her

eyes out, dash her!

Sorry," Polly

suddenly smiled, feeling

better after that.

"All right, Betty

darling! Of course,

you've done the proper

thing. Just as

well I was not con-

sulted. Now I realise

it will enable Judy to

enjoy herself for

once."

After a turn about

the room, Polly

added:

"At least, I sup-

pose it will!

Although, if it were

my brother who was

going on like this, I

couldn't bear to see

him with the girl.

I'd much rather have

them go off on their

own. To think that

we've been cutting

sandwiches for her!"

"I thought you

were feeling better,"

smiled Morcove's

Form captain. Then

she sighed. "All

I know is, I'm trying

to do the best for all,

Polly. Supposing we

had refused to have

her with us for the

outing? Wouldn't

that have given Dave

cause to be even more

off-hand with us?"

The madcap

tugged open a drawer

to supply herself with

a fresh handkerchief,

then closed the drawer—

slam!

"Even if it had done that, Betty—

Oh, I

don't care what they do, or what we do about

them. I'm ready, when everybody else is."

"Fancy the others mostly are, and I shan't

be a jiffy," Betty said, recovering her blitheness.

"They say that hoarding down the road looks

as good as ever now."

"So what a pity," Polly rejoined tartly, on the

way out of the room, "not to let the girl come

to the picnic! Oh!" And this time the door

went slam!

Morcove's headstrong junior being as dis-

gruntled as this, it was only an instance of the

way life goes that she met, a few moments later,

Thelma Curtis.

They did not speak. Polly had no hesitation

about looking as black as thunder. As for Thelma

Curtis, she was in haste to get ready for the

outing, passing by with a very jaunty step. She conformed a very sweet smile, as if to say: "Now we are going to be friends!"

Downstairs, Polly came upon Madge Minden, Tess Trelawney, Helen Craig, and Dolly Delane, all ready to be off. They laughed when they saw how she looked; but it was not that their laughter offended her that she hurried out into the open air.

She saw her brother Jack, chatting with Jimmy Cherrol and more of the girls, on the front grass,

and she strolled across to them. She could say what she liked to Jack, anyhow. That was what brothers were for!

"Has Thelma Curtis been asked which way she would like the party to go?" was Polly's scathing inquiry.

"Have you asked her if she has any particular fancy?"

"I will do so,"

Jack grinned, "as soon as she shows up."

"Oh, don't be funny!"

"My dear old Polly-wolly—"

"Where is Dave?" she frowned. "Does he know?"

"As I saw him just now putting on a fresh collar and tie—presumably he does," said Jack, refusing to be serious.

"Here's Judy," came a whispered warning from tall Pam Willoughby.

She feared that Polly and Jack, whilst "scrapping," might come out with remarks concerning Dave that it would be better for that boy's sister not to hear.

Then Polly, desisting from her onslaught upon Jack, turned round, and at sight of Judy all her exasperation ended. It was such a relief, such a treat to see Judy looking happy once more.

But there was no time for anything, however tactful, to be said. Out by the front door came Thelma Curtis herself, wearing a showy sports jacket in which she obviously fancied herself.

Whether her appearance upon the scene had anything to do with the sudden scooting away of Jack and Jimmy is a matter for conjecture. Their own loudly stated reason for dashing off was that they had better see about "that grub."

But Jack could have been heard to say, under his breath, to Jimmy:

"Gosh, see what she's wearing?"

Thelma herself was ready to gush away to all the girls as if she thought it such a pity that she was only now on friendly terms with them. But Morcove became very animated.



Mrs. Curtis was trying to be very sweet all at once. "I wonder if Thelma might come with you to the picnic?" she gushed. "You'd better ask Betty," was Polly's chilly retort.

Not a few of the juniors even ran off to see if they could help Jack and Jimmy. A great excitement over the start-off was worked up, so as to avoid embarrassment. All Thelma could do, amidst such lively proceedings, was to turn to Judy Cardew very boldly.

"We're going to have a lovely outing? Such a bee-yootiful day! And your brother—I take it he is coming, too?"

"Oh, bound to be!" There was no edge to Judy's voice; no nettled look. Strength of character enabled her to bear and forbear.

She detested this shallow, affected girl; but Betty and others had allowed her, Judy, to imagine that Thelma was to join the picnic so that an attempt at harmony might be made—for the sake of the Delanes. On those grounds, Judy was quite ready to put up with the girl, at the same time feeling confident that Dave would be induced to go with them all.

"You know, I like your brother!" Thelma said, with a false-sweet smile. "So clever! So quiet! You never know what he is thinking, do you?"

"We neither of us have much to say, I'm afraid, ever."

"He knows such a lot about nature, and all that, doesn't he? The walks we've had together—"

But Pam and Madge, within earshot, could not leave Judy at the mercy of a tongue like that. They moved nearer, and Pam's tact enabled her to make the intervention seem quite innocent.

"Judy—do look at the procession!"

"Oh, very funny—ha, ha, ha!" Thelma loudly pealed, as she, like Judy, looked round to see what Pam had meant.

From a doorway giving direct access to the kitchen quarters, Jimmy and Jack had come forth together, carrying a picnic-basket between them.

They must have been exaggerating its weight, for it never could have been so laden with mere eatables, and possibly some cutlery and crockery, as to cause them to stagger as they did.

Behind these two came Naomer, carrying one string marketing-bag, containing bananas, oranges and apples. Marching beside her was Bobby Bloot, her affinity where a love of good living was concerned.

Bobby carried a big kettle, a twisted iron bar that looked extraordinarily like a bent poker, and a cluster of tin mugs.

These utensils, tied together by a bit of string passed through all their handles, created such a merry tinkling that "the procession" sounded like a herd of cattle in the Alps wearing cow-bells.

Next came Polly and several other Morcovians, more or less burdened for the journey. It could never have been Paula's wish to saddle herself with sundry primed bottles, tied up in an old sack. But such was her burden.

"Company!" bellowed Jack, who did not mean to let anything affect his love of the burlesque. "Fall in! 'Shun!"

He caught sight of Paula with the sack. "Any rag, bottle or bone! Corporal Bloot, have you got the corkscrew?"

"Yes, sir!" said Bobby, holding up the twisted iron bar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Then Betty came running out by the front door, to come under the stern eye of the self-appointed commanding officer. It was an eye to which Jack pretended to affix a monocle.

"Hey, hey, what's this; late again! And now — Oh, my giddy aunt, where's Dave, if he is

coming? We'll never get away! That's right," as Bobby suddenly dropped all the tin mugs. "Just because they're cheap!"

And now Dave came out to them all. He looked entirely amiable, making it all the more staggering for his fellow juniors when he said quietly:

"I hope you won't mind if I don't come?"

Such a Surprise

EVERY girl there became agape with blank amazement. In this first moment of the crashing surprise to which Dave had treated everybody, only his boy chums evidenced bitter indignation.

This was particularly so in the case of Jack Linton. He looked ready to fight Dave.

"I hope you have a jolly picnic," Dave said, calm as ever. "Which way are you going?"

"Does that matter to you?" Jack retorted hotly. "You're going to please yourself, aren't you—as you have done all the time we've been here? Well, then, you can jolly well leave us to please ourselves!"

"Bekas—et is not being ze sport, Dave!" shrilled Naomer, carried away by her feelings. "Ah, bah, I call zis a mean trick! Eet seems to be a joke with you, to spoil ze hole for us!"

"He is not going to do that," Jack said fiercely. "Well, push off, Dave! Go your own way, and we'll go ours."

"I was afraid you'd feel offended," Dave murmured. "But I'm asking you, as chums of mine —"

"Chums of yours!" snorted Polly. "Oh!"

"—Not to mind," he finished, unmoved.

"Oh, I don't mind," Polly shrugged. "I don't know about—anybody else." She was meaning, of course, Thelma Curtis!

That girl was finding it hard indeed to conceal her disappointment. Betty and Co. had only to glance at her to have their belief confirmed; she never would have considered joining the picnic if she had not been sure of Dave's presence in the party.

Paid out! That, at any rate, was a bit of consolation for Morcove. But it did not count for much when they had now to realise that they were to have Thelma's unwanted company—without the compensation of seeing Judy happy with her brother during the outing.

Maddening! Frowning looks proclaimed the things that some of the girls would like to say.

"Come on, boys," Jack said, desperately attempting the old levity. He always included Betty and Co. in the term "boys." "No more hanging about."

"I should think not!" said Polly. "So, good-bye, and I hope eet will be fine for you!" Naomer said.

They saw Judy go up to Dave and put a question to him. But it must have gone unanswered. She remained talking with Dave whilst the things to be carried along by the picnickers were taken up, ready for the move-off.

However gently and even affectionately he dealt with his sister, Dave remained unswayed by what must have been earnest entreaties. In the end, she left him, coming back to her chums with a very sad look.

"Never mind, Judy darling," two or three of them tried to comfort her.

"But what does he mean by it?" she questioned in a husky whisper. "That's what I want to know. What does it all mean?"

WHAT did it mean?

They wondered—all of them.

As they straggled away, making for the chosen picnic spot, there was an inclination to walk in twos and threes, Dave's latest action the one topic of subdued conversation.

"But it's a shame!" Polly raged softly, walking with Betty and Pam. "Look at the way we're starting out—for a picnic! Who's got a laugh to raise now? Where is the enjoyment—when we are all like this?"

"Too bad," Betty frowned.

"And we're saddled with HER," was Polly's furious comment. "That is simply—oh, sickening!"

"My fault, I suppose," Betty grimaced.

"Yours? Why?"

"Trying to be clever! A bit of clumsy diplomacy that hasn't come off!"

"Betty, you meant it for the best," Pam said gently. "It was good of you to think only of Judy, and to get us to do the same. There was every reason to believe that Dave would join the party, knowing that Thelma Curtis was going to do so."

"There was," Polly disgustedly agreed. "But—dash it all, then why didn't he!"

"Perhaps," Betty pondered, "he thought we would be teasing him in front of her?"

"Oh, I don't think so," demurred Pam. "Dave has too much character to mind teasing."

"Character! I'd like to know what's become of his character lately," Polly scowled. "He was, at one time, a splendid fellow. I liked him awfully. I—next to Jack

— Oh, hang, what's the use of going on? We shan't enjoy ourselves."

"Oh, we'll manage!" Betty predicted, smiling mirthlessly. "I expect your brother will be good for a few laughs presently."

"If Jack tries to be funny to-day he will only get on my nerves. To think of it —" Polly sighed. "That Curtis girl—going to stay with us all the time!"

"But will she?" Pam doubted serenely.

"Or won't she be inclined to slip away, now that Dave isn't in the party?"

"Cheer up on that, Polly," counselled Betty. "I shouldn't wonder!"

"Then did he—did he stay away, feeling sure that that would lead her to desert the party in a little while?" Polly's tormented mind compelled her to argue. "So that they could get off somewhere together, after all, or be at home at the manor, with the garden to themselves."

"I don't think so," Pam said. "If he had wanted to hang round her, with us others out of the way, he could have given her a hint, and she'd have jumped at it. She's that sort."

"Oh, we know what she is," said Polly.

Betty laughed. Very little charity was in Polly's heart towards Thelma Curtis.

"Have you considered?" Pam resumed, after a heavy silence.

"What, Pam?"

"It looks as if he and she have quarrelled."

A strong light seemed to pass across the faces of Betty and Polly.

"You mean, Pam—"

"He just doesn't want to be with her now. Simply because she was coming with us, he wouldn't—felt he couldn't—"

"But that—that's splendid, if it is so!" Betty rejoiced. "Except that if I hadn't allowed her to come with us, then he would have—"

"You weren't to know that, Betty," said Polly, in a fuming way. "Anyhow, it's done now. But how lovely, if he is done with her! I wonder if Judy has thought of that? I must tell her. It would mean such a lot to her!"

The very plausible theory did more than comfort Judy only. Another minute, and it was common property amongst the girls and boys of Morcove and Grangemoor.

Dejection gave place to bounding spirits. Now for a jolly outing, after all! As for the presence of Thelma Curtis—that had become a joke to be chuckled about, in secret.

Jack was in great form now. He could act the clown as much as he liked, and there was no fear of his getting on Polly's nerves, after all!

Indeed, Polly herself was all for fun now. Such a wonderful pick-me-up had it been, to feel certain that Dave, although absent from the



Jack assumed what he evidently imagined to be the attitude of an Ancient Briton. "Cave man, complete with stone hammer!" he explained. "Gurr-rr!"

party, was all the time wishing he was with them—and Thelma out of the way. A quarrel! And jolly good job, too!

The picnic was to be held at the cromlech—that strange stone table, dating from prehistoric times, which formed a landmark at the summit of one of the hills lying around the manor. It was not far for the party to go, laden with all their provisions and necessary utensils. But the last few hundred yards presented a stiff climb.

Jack, as usual, had to have his jest. "Hannibal crossing the Alps, boys! Mes enfants, allez!" He cheered on the foundering girls. "An army marches upon its stomach!" "I shall soon be crawling upon mine," said Polly. "Pouf! This short grass—"

"Slippery!" "Dweadful!" groaned Paula. She was no longer carrying the sackload of chinking bottles; even so, her own exertions were not sufficient. Gallantly, Jack slithered over the down-grass to offer a helping hand.

"Not fair!" Naomer promptly shrieked. "Bekas, what about me? Hi, Bobby, lend me a hand! What do you call yourself?"

"The Pride of the Regiment!" Jack lyrically supplied a title for beefy Bobby. "Or, Only a Little Drummer-boy! The shades of night were falling fast, when—"

"Aiow!" from Paula, as Jack felled her just a bit too fast uphill. "Isn't theah anothah way woud'?"

"There is NO other way," said Jack hoarsely. "Yonder lies our goal—goal! But half-time, boys! Spell-o!"

"And what about a refresher, to be going on with?" was Naomer's proposal. "Bekas, I could drink zo river!"

"Is it really worth the fag?" Thelma spoke disdainfully. "I feel rather like—turning back." "Oh, don't say that!" Betty pleaded. "There is such a grand view from the top. You must see that!"

"Yes!" was the chorus from others. "Oh, this is grand—such fun!"

"You mustn't think of deserting us," Polly added slyly to Thelma.

"I—er—wasn't. At least, I don't know that I shall be able to stay long."

"But you must have lunch with us!" Betty insisted.

"Beware the fearful heavy lunch," said Jack, starting to scramble on again, up a hillside so steep that a dislodged stone rolled a good way down before stopping in the grass. "On a bright morning in April, a party of small girls might have been seen, but weren't—"

"Hit him," Polly demanded. "Race any of you to the top!" she suddenly challenged, and was off.

"Hooray!" Jack cheered, levelling a pair of field-glasses they had brought with them. "The favourite wins!"

"Boo, Grangemoor!" his sister shouted back to him, whilst pounding on in the race to the summit with Naomer, Pam, and others. "You couldn't!"

That did it. Jack's coat came off in a jiffy, and with it over one arm he charged up the hill. Cheers from those who were admiring his acceptance of the challenge caused the girl racers to look round.

Jack overtook them all. He became an easy winner, crouching on hands and knees under the stone table by the time they all reached that relic of bygone ages.

"Cave-man, with stone hammer complete," he explained his new role. "Gurr-rrr!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You bad doggie," Polly addressed him, treating the stone table as a kennel. "Lie down, Fido, or you'll be put on the chain."

Jimmy set down the sack of mineral and other waters on the slab of rock, which stood full shoulder high on its supporting stones. He mopped his forehead. But it was hefty Bobby Blot who was most thankful to be able to cast down a load.

"Jimmy, did you leave the girls to carry the basket?" Jack reproached his chum.

"What did you carry?" Polly demanded.

"I was O.C. troops," her brother blandly explained. "As such, I reckon I ought to have been carried myself. However, here we are, boys. Grill-room, on the ground floor." And he pointed to the grass growing under the stone table. "The a la carte restaurant, first floor; take the lift!"

"We can light a fire to boil the kettle," Betty cried. "Mr. Delane said so. Dry grass, girls, come on!"

So, whilst the madcap and others unpacked the eatables, and set out all the utensils, a few of the girls ran about, gathering armfuls of stuff for a camp fire.

Five minutes, and the fire was "touched off" with a match applied by Jimmy.

It was such an instantaneous flaring and sizzling Jack pretended to get caught by it about the eyebrows. He leapt clear with a howled "Wow!" and very nearly landed backwards amongst all the plates of eatables.

"He shan't have anything, that's all," Polly decreed. "I'd send him back home, only there would be no one to do the washing-up, presently. Er—how about the table?" she inquired dubiously. "Yes, do we use it?" laughed Betty. "Rather high!"

"And no chairs!" chuckled Helen.

"Ah, bah, zis is good enough for me!" cried Naomer, occupying a patch of turf close to the tempting array. And Bobby Blot can sit next to me, so I shall have somebody to see fair play! Bekas—"

"Oh, look at the kettle—quick!"

That was Betty, as she saw the kettle drop sideways into the fire.

The iron "corkscrew" had been applied, gipsy-fashion, to suspend the kettle over the fire, but either the kettle's weight, when filled, had been under-estimated or the heat from the fire had served the iron stuck in the ground, a trick.

There was a wild rush by several of the picnickers to get the capsized kettle out of the smother before all the water would be spilled, but no one was in time. Jimmy, quickest of all, filched out the kettle, but he had to display it as lidless and empty.

"Sweadle!"

"Ah, deah!" sighed Paula. "And I did so welsh the idea of a cup!"

"Was that all the water we brought?" moaned Polly.

"That was all the water," Betty nodded. "There is still some lemonade."

"Queek, Bobby! Run and get ze sack!"

"But we must," Polly insisted, "boil a kettle! What's a picnic without a fire, and a kettle? Jack dear, like a good boy—run back to the Manor—"

"Wha-a-at!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Or else," Polly sweetly notified her brother, "you can't have anything. Sorry, and all that, but—go away!" as he executed a sort of desperate swoop.

At this instant fresh disaster occurred. It was

a case of catastrophe upon catastrophe. Young Blot, sent to fetch the sack containing the mineral waters, fell over the discarded kettle.

The sack went with him, violently to the grass, and there was such a splintering crash of breaking bottles as rendered it quite superfluous for Polly to yell:

"What's THAT!"

"That," Betty laughed feebly, "is the lemonade. Also one or two ginger-beers, and some home-made—"

"Then we've got nothing to drink, now—nothing!"

"Nothing!"

"Well, get on wiz ze eating, any old how! Bekas, what ze diggings, I'm starvingk!"

"There was a pause," said Jack solemnly, after a general silence. "Nothing was to be heard but the gnashing of Naomer's teeth."

"Mine are gnashing," said Polly, "only you can't hear them. Oh, but this is! Not a drop of anything to drink!"

"Tewwible! I am so thirsty, geals."

"I think, if you don't mind, I'll stroll back," Thelma interposed airily.

Polly slowly turned to say with a teasing smile:

"Bored? I expect you are!"

"Oh, don't be rude!"

"Well! Haven't you often been rude to us?" This was the bursting of a storm, and Betty realised that she must stop it.

"That's enough, Polly dear!"

"Then let her go, before I lose my temper!" cried Morcove's hothead, as if she had not lost her temper already.

"I'm going!" Thelma said, chin in air. "It was kind of you all to have me—"

"And wasn't it kind of you to come?" Polly flared out again, in spite of entreating gestures from several of her chums. "Especially when you found that he wasn't coming, after all!"

"He?"

"Oh—humbug!"

"Thank you! Now I see," Thelma said, drawing off with a great show of dignity. "I was only invited to be insulted in the end. A nice lot you make, I must say!"

And she stalked away.

Who Can Forgive Him Now?

"O H, boy," Jack Linton chuckled, "that's torn it!"

"She's been asking for it; time she had it!" Polly retorted. "Not a word to say to any of us all the way from the manor. Simply too grand—I noticed!—for us, with our liking for a bit of fun. She's been longing to go—"

"Yes, well, she has gone," Pam said serenely. "So that's that. Oh, and look here; we needn't go without drinkables. I've an idea. It's an easy walk to the reservoir, on the other hill. We might go along—"

"But she's gone that way," Judy broke in uneasily. "I don't know why, I'm sure. It's a roundabout way for her to be going back to the manor."

"She didn't care to go down this steep slope, watched by us, I suppose," Helen laughed. "It is rather hard, you know, to be dignified whilst slithering downhill."

"Grab first; tea later!" Jack gaily proposed. "Gather round, boys—"

"We had better," Polly agreed grimly, "before Naomer scoffs the lot. Why, goodness, the sandwiches seem to have—vanished!"

"Not ze bit of eet; bekas, as ze matter of fact, I have only started on ze jam-tart that Mrs. Delane put out for us."

"Jam-tart—where?" clamoured Jack.

"It's gone now."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But," Naomer sparkled, "he was a good one, I can tell you!"

Judy was the last to find a seat for herself upon the warm turf. Her gaze had been following the receding figure of Thelma Curtis when Betty said lightly:

"It's all right, Judy dear. You may be quite sure of that."

"Yes, boys, there's hope for Dave yet," chortled Jack, whilst the hand-round started. "Jimmy lad, we'll take him back into the fold by-and-by. And to think that only yesterday I was wanting to fight him. What, lettuce? Radishes? Gee, some function!"

"Jolly good sandwiches," Jimmy commented. "Who made 'em?"

"I didn't," Pam candidly disclaimed—for Jimmy had looked to her for an answer. "I didn't do anything. That's why I think I should be allowed to take the kettle along to the reservoir and bring it back full."

"Oh, no!" said Polly. "Jack will do that. Jack dear—"

But he was not attending. As if it were some feat he had to perform for a wager, he was nibbling steadily at the lengthy heart of a lettuce. His eyes were turned down to the bit of green stuff as it rapidly shortened.

"That I can't stand," said Polly. "Turning yourself into a rabbit."

So she arose and, to the merriment of the rest, set about ejecting him from the happy circle. Finally, he crawled away and became an aggrieved outcast, haranguing the feasters from on top of the cromlech.

Mounted upon the ancient stone table, he held forth with much shaking of a fist in the air. It was a fine flow of street-corner oratory, keeping the girls in peals of laughter. Finally, Polly's heart was so touched that she made a collection for him, whereupon he made quite a graceful speech of thanks.

A little after this Pam jumped up and ran to get the kettle.

"I'm off for that water."

"I'll come with you," Judy proposed lightly, and they set off together.

The way lay along level ground for a quarter of a mile, then dipped in a gentle undulation of the rolling hills. Here and there a ragged hedge, with a few wind-twisted, stunted trees, obscured any distant view. But the two girls had the Manor in sight almost all the time, as it lay so snugly in the valley.

"Several cars in front of the porch, Judy?"

"Yes! I wonder if it means people who are going to make a stay? Or are they only getting lunch?"

"I should hardly think so. Anyway, let's hope that some of them are fresh p-g's. Judy, it will be awful for the Delanes if, when our time comes to leave, there are no guests left."

"That hoarding we put up will do a bit of good—bound to," Judy said hopefully. "And it has been made to look so attractive again, after last night's disagreements."

Pam became reflective. Although Judy shared the general belief that Thelma Curtis had done that malicious deed in the night, she had not been allowed to know what all her chums knew—that

evidence had been discovered at the spot, implicating Dave.

Hence Pam's silence now. She was thinking of the red-glass reflector that had been found in the grass, close to the damaged hoarding, first thing this morning. She and others knew that it was a reflector belonging to Dave's bicycle. Not only had they at once recognised it, by its distinctive pattern; afterwards, they had examined Dave's machine at the Manor, and found that the reflector was missing.

The inference had been that Dave must have been at least a passive witness to Thelma's misdeed. Not to believe that was to believe that Dave had secretly cycled to the spot, alone, to do the deed. But Betty and the rest had felt that to be—*incredible!*

They had, however, been able to imagine his having accompanied Thelma, and then, when the spiteful whim seized her, being too taken with her to offer any opposition.

Now Pam had a quite different theory about it all. She was sure that Betty and others must have thought of it, for it squared with Dave's staying away from the picnic, when Thelma had joined it.

Dave had not, after all, been present when the hoarding was disfigured. That was the new theory. *His bicycle had been borrowed!*

What was more, this morning he had made certain discoveries of his own, resulting in a complete change of feeling towards Thelma. He knew that hers had been the hand to do that malicious deed, and so—he was done with her.

"Pam—"

"Yes, Judy? Sorry! I was thinking about something."

"Would it be—about Dave? I wonder if you can imagine, Pam, how glad I am that he seems to have finished with Thelma. I wasn't being unreasonable about it all, was I, Pam?"

"Oh, no, Judy."

They were going uphill again now, with a gap in a hedge to pass through, and then they would be almost at the Manor House reservoir.

"Almost," Judy murmured ardently, "it was as good as having Dave with us for the picnic, to know that he only kept away to avoid her."

"Yes, Judy. That's how we have all felt, of course. And when we get back, later on—why, it will be just like old times."

Judy laughed softly.

"Jack makes a joke of everything. His saying that they would take Dave back 'into the fold.' But there was a lot of real gladness there, Pam."

"Next to you, Judy, I suppose Jack and Polly have felt all these upsets about Dave, more than any of us. Only natural. Jack and Dave—such chums."

"And Polly," Judy nodded, "she has always been so fond of Dave. I've been glad. Dave is so serious, and I'm a bit that way inclined myself. So it's just as well that a girl like Polly should be—"

The rest went unvoiced. Judy had broken off as abruptly as that, being greatly startled now that she and Pam had passed through the hedge-gap and could see the hilltop reservoir, only a few hundred yards away.

"Why, look, Pam! There they are—together!"

"Dave and—Thelma? Never!"

But Pam saw that it was so, and all her revived happiness, like Judy's, died away instantly.

Clearly in view on the skyline were Dave and Thelma—together once again.

Jack Linton's Threat

THE shock—the reaction to all the former loss of faith in Dave—it was as great for Pam as it was for Judy.

It could not be otherwise, when Pam was so concerned, as all the others had been, for Judy's peace of mind.

"Pam!" broke from Judy at last in a tone of utter dismay.

"Yes, well, Judy, it's a pity—this! It—it means, of course—"

"Oh, it means that we've been all wrong in our idea as to why Dave kept away from the picnic," Judy quavered. "He—he isn't done with Thelma Curtis, after all!"

"Still, dear, you mustn't—"

"It's sickening," poor Judy exclaimed drearily. "The wretched affair is still going on, when we thought it was all over!"

Then came a whisper of fierce scorn.

"That girl slipped away, knowing where to meet him! It was all arranged—oh, Pam! How badly we're being treated, all of us, and by Dave, my own brother!"

"Judy dear, we must turn back—but no, they are walking away, now they have seen us," Pam said, finding it hard to retain her usual composure. "So we can get the kettle filled and then go back to the others."

"What to do? Enjoy the rest of the outing? Tell them about this latest? No, thank you," Judy said, with half-tearful bitterness. "I shall go down to the Manor—"

"Then I'll come with you, dear."

"No, Pam—please not! Listen! Will you explain to the others? I shall be better out of the way. I can imagine how fed-up they'll all feel, and it's too great a strain on my chums to have to keep quiet because I'm on hand. I'll go home."

She added mournfully, taking the first downhill steps:

"I said home—I wish I could go home. I feel I'd like to have a word with mother. You know I felt half inclined to write and get her to come. Now I wish I had. See you later, Pam."

"Very well, Judy."

Dave and Thelma had passed out of sight now, over the brow of the hill. Pam, whilst Judy drifted dejectedly down to the valley where the Manor nestled, ran to the reservoir, easily filled the kettle to the brim, and then set off back with it at a good pace.

As soon as she had her fellow-picnickers in sight again, she could tell that great fun was being had. But they saw her returning without Judy, and that resulted in their being in a wondering state by the time she got to them.

"Where's Judy, then?"

"Full to the brim," Pam said, setting down the kettle.

"Thanks, Pam, awfully! But—where's Judy?"

"Oh, she's gone home to the Manor."

"Gone—home!"

"Bekas, what ze diggings—"

"Pam?" the clamour increased. "What's the matter?"

"Well, there's been a fresh upset."

"Not about Dave?" jerked out Betty. "And that girl?"

"Yes."

"Gosh! Oh, heck!" Jack exploded. "Here, Jimmy—you and I—"

"That's no good," Pam said quietly. "Judy and I were just getting to the reservoir, when we saw Dave and Thelma there. They walked on over the hills, but they were together—"

"Again!" gasped several of the listeners.

"Well!"

"So he is not done with her after all!"

"Bai Jove—extraordinary!"

"Hear Paula—'extraordinary'!" Polly suddenly raged out. "When it's absolutely rotten! It means that they knew where to find each other. She only came—for a blind!"

"And it means more than that even," Betty said. "Remember that business about the hoarding, girls!"

"Yes, Betty, yes!"

"His bike was used. We've got to go back to our first belief—he was with her then!"

"As he is always with her," Jack scowled.

"And he made no attempt to stop her," Betty continued. "We're not supposing that they both set off to do the damage; they were riding by the hoarding, and then it occurred to her to dismount and disfigure it."

"That's it!"

Betty suddenly drew something from her pocket.

"Jack, will you take this?"

It was the red reflector-glass, in its nickel frame, that changed hands.

For, wonder of wonders, she had come in by the wide-open front doorway of Cromlech Manor a moment since, to find herself confronted with the very one for whom she was longing.

Mother, here—and at a time of crisis like this!

"But, Judy," said the young widow, after an exchange of very loving kisses, "why are you back so soon from the picnic? I was told you had all gone off for the day. The others are not coming in now?"



Judy stopped dead. "Why, look, Pam! There they are together—Dave and Thelma!"

"No, mother. I—I left them, that's all."

"You left them? Haven't fallen out with your chums, I hope, dear?"

"Oh, no, mother—of course not!"

"Then what is it, Judy? You don't look as if you were enjoying the holiday much. Don't you like it here?"

"Mother, it's just lovely. The Delanes are ever so nice, and the weather has been perfect. We're all hoping they will get plenty of paying guests."

"Some have come in, as I have done, Judy, in the last hour or so. You know, Judy, I had a sudden longing, this morning, to pack a bag, jump in the car, and come along to spend the rest of the holiday with you and Dave, at this glorious place—as I can see it is, wonderful! How is Dave, dear?"

"Oh, he's enjoying himself."

"At the picnic, of course? He'll be as surprised as you were! Not sorry I've turned up, darling?"

"Mother, when I was longing to see you. I was going to write, by this evening's post, begging you to come!"

"I've had a splendid lunch, and I've got a lovely little room, Judy; it looks on to the old garden at the back—those grass terraces, and

Her Wish, and Yet—

"MOTHER! Why—"

"Hallo, Judy darling! Got a kiss for me?"

"Mother!" came again from Judy's lips, parted wide with surprise. "Oh—just fancy!"

the daffs amongst the apple-trees, and the tennis-court. I see they have clock golf, too, Judy, and a putting-green. You must be enjoying yourselves. Now I must run upstairs and unpack. Will you come with me, dear?"

"Yes, mother, I'd love it."

So up they went, together, a hand resting lovingly all the while upon Judy's shoulder.

The bed-room corridor into which they turned had other luggage besides Mrs. Cardew's dumped about. And Judy not only encountered one or two fresh faces, but heard the voices of other new arrivals.

"Why, mother, there must be half a dozen new guests!" she commented gladly, after they had reached the bed-room. "How splendid for the Delanes!"

"Yes, dear; and, at lunch they all seemed just as favourably impressed as I was, the moment I got here. What did I see, on a very charming advertisement board, down the road, about 'Dancing in the Barn'?"

"Tess painted that advertisement, mother! As for the dancing—we thought we'd do the Delanes a good turn by cleaning out the barn and making it all nice, with lanterns."

"But how splendid! You've had other people staying, of course, dear?"

"There have been a few, mother, only—they haven't stopped. It's a shame; something has always happened to turn them against the place. We've been worried about it, because, of course, if that sort of thing goes on, the Delanes will be ruined."

"Um!" said Judy's mother. "Not so good! But there is a Mrs. Curtis and her daughter, so Mrs. Delane told me; they are still here, after a month?"

"Yes, mother."

"Is the daughter nice?"

"We—we haven't liked her," Judy faltered.

"No, I can't say she is nice."

"Pity. What does Dave think of her? He's a pretty good judge of character, I always think. Same as you about her?"

Poor Judy! It had been all very well and only natural for her to long for mother to be here. But now there was this awful embarrassment, a not knowing what to say. Anything in the nature of "telling" was so horrid.

"Well, dear? But hark!" Mrs. Cardew added, looking joyful as she reared her head to listen. "I believe I hear Dave now—down there in the garden!"

She darted to the window.

"Yes, it is! But who, Judy, is the girl he is with? Come and see, dear. It isn't one of your Morocco chums."

Judy did not respond; she could not make the movement that would place her at her mother's side at the open window.

"They seem to be going to start a putting game, Judy."

After a moment Mrs. Cardew turned round. Then she took a few quick strides to get a closer look at her daughter, whose face was deathly pale.

"You didn't answer me, Judy dear. Why this silence? I'm simply asking you, Judy—who is that girl down there with Dave?"

"It is the one we were talking about, mother."

Judy spoke at last. "The girl—Thelma Curtis."

OUT in the garden, where a budding beech dappled the putting-green with sunlight and shadow, Thelma Curtis laughed lightly at a question Dave had put to her.

"Tired—me? Not a bit! I'll play you, if you'll get the clubs. But I think I will run upstairs first and change out of my walking shoes. I wonder if mother is in!"

Indoors, she brushed past two or three people who were fresh arrivals, wanting them to turn and stare after her as she went on to the stairs, all airs and graces. Thelma liked to be noticed.

But she would have been sorry for anyone to notice her looks as she went upstairs. As it happened, she encountered no one, and so she spared the effort it would have been to banish an irritable, worried expression.

Making straight for her mother's bed-room, she tapped upon the closed door.

"Yes, what is it? I'm lying down."

"It's I, mother." And Thelma went in.

Mrs. Curtis rolled off the bed and assumed a bridling posture.

"Just when I hoped to get a nap, Thelma! I expect to be out to-night, when I should be in bed. I have not been able to go near that reservoir. That Cardew boy was all over the place; I seemed unable to dodge him. Why didn't he go with the picnic party?"

"The only reason I can think of," Thelma softly returned—"he does suspect us! I had the wind up when I found I must go with those girls, and that he would be staying behind. I guessed! He meant to keep his eye on YOU!"

"And he did that, right enough, Thelma," was the sour rejoinder. "Confound the boy! I did think there would be a chance during the day. I made sure it would decoy him out of the way—you going with those other girls."

"I left them as soon as I could and hurried to the reservoir, to warn you that he was not with the party. You were not there; he was! Now he has come back with me."

"But to-night, Thelma—to-night the business must be done!" Mrs. Curtis said fiercely. "The house has filled up again. We've got to drive all these new guests away in a disgusted mood, and trifling-upsets are no use. The water supply! I mean to wreck it. These Delanes—"

She had to pause; ferocity had left her out of breath.

"These Delanes shall not be allowed to make a paying proposition of this place they have inherited. I want it, Thelma—as I am entitled to have it, if they are unable to carry on. Under the will, they must let me have the first offer, and the worse straits they are in, the more I can beat them down."

Thelma nodded. She knew all about this; was in her mother's confidence to the extent of being a confederate.

"Shall I, mother, creep out to-night and go up to the reservoir, to—"

"No! I must do it, and that's why I want to rest now. I may have to wait up until long past midnight. So go away, Thelma. The best thing you can do is to treat him as if you didn't suspect that he suspected us."

"That's what I am doing," Thelma said, turning back to the door.

IN one of the other bed-rooms of Cromlech Manor, at that moment, Mrs. Cardew was motioning Judy to seat herself.

"You must tell me more, Judy dear. I must know all. Of course, my poor darling, you hate having to say anything that seems like speaking against your brother. But I'm your mother—and his."

"Oh, I know! But—"

"Don't cry, dear. Take a little time. I can wait. I am sure it will be best, dear, that I understand the position exactly before I go down to Dave. He doesn't know I am here, evidently. Now, Judy—just tell me all about it!"

Stop Them

DAVE CARDEW was waiting for Thelma Curtis at the putting-green in the Manor garden.

When he went indoors for a minute, to get the "putters" and a couple of golf balls, he had seen two or three new faces. They seemed to be pleasant fresh-comers to the guest-house, and that was fine.

Well, it would not be his fault if they and any other new guests did not stay longer than others had done. He was up against it, one way and another—over his sister and her chums, and his pals of Grangemoor School.

But he had to see this thing through, and nothing—nothing must induce him to account to them all for his strange conduct.

For, of course, it had seemed more than strange to them. He could imagine what they were thinking about him.

Queer, that the great snag for him had been, and still was, the very friendship between them all that he so greatly admired. Judy and her Morcove chums—they were such splendid pals, they told each other everything. Simply had to!

So he dare not confide in Judy even—his own sister. Tell her, and how could you expect her to keep it all from the others when she saw them showing you open disgust? The measure of Judy's sisterly love was the measure of that risk of her telling the others, if she herself were told. A tremendous risk, just as her devotion was—tremendous.

"Now, Dave, I'm ready to take you on!"

Thelma came mincing across the lawn to him. She had put on tennis shoes and was wearing a very "arty" jumper.

"Seen the new guests?"

"One or two."

"They say quite a number have come in. I hope they stay, don't you? If only for the sake of the Delanes!"

Dave dropped a golf ball for her to play, by way of a start. She made a great fuss over her first stroke.

"Bother. It rolled away because of that bump in the grass. I do think the Delanes might have re-laid this turf."

Dave swayed his iron, tapped, and "holed out in one."

"Wretch!" she pouted. "I believe you're one of those horrid people, efficient in everything. Well, I don't pretend to be a wonderful shot."

But she was trying to be, and couldn't. At the fourth hole, Dave was four up.

"Beaten already," she sighed prettily.

"Oh—not yet," he smiled.

"But you mean to beat me!"

"I hope so."

"Don't be too sure," she said, thinking of that other game which was being played between them, as he was.

She took her stand for another stroke—then raised her eyes from the ball.

With startling suddenness, the quiet garden was receiving an inrush of girls and boys through an arched gateway in the high flint wall.

Morcove—back from the picnic, with the boys.

It might have been only a momentary surprise for Thelma and Dave, but they realised that the returned picnickers, were coming across to them in a very significant way.

Two of the boys, at least, were in ugly mood. Jack and Jimmy—they seemed to want to out-speed the girls, but several of the latter were running just as fast, at the same time panting disuading words.

Thelma must have sensed the meaning of it all as quickly as Dave. She turned to him, looking frightened. He did not notice her. His eyes were fixed steadily upon one figure in the on-rushing crowd of juniors—the foremost figure, Jack Linton!

It was remembered by some of the girls, afterwards, that Dave instantly dropped his golfing iron to the grass, as if to face wrathful-looking Jack empty-handed.

Then the two were confronting each other, at close quarters. Jack, doubly heated by running as well as by all his pent-up rage, Dave as cool as a cucumber—so the two boys stood, meeting each other's eyes.

Jimmy half-turned to wave the girls to stand clear, if they would not go away.

"Yes, we've come back," Jack stated the obvious, breathlessly. "To find you, Dave Cardew."

"Well, Jack, you've found me."

"We have. And now—in front of this girl, and all the better!—let me show you something that Betty and her chums found, this morning, down by that damaged hoarding."

Jack opened his hand, displaying the red-glass reflector.

"Belongs to your bike, I think?"

"Why—yes, that's right. I recognise it easily."

"They recognised it easily," Jack said fiercely.

"And so they knew, Dave Cardew!"

"Knew what?"

"I'm going to tell you, for Judy isn't here. We wouldn't have her know—she is ashamed of you enough as it is. The discovery of this reflector of yours, Dave, down there at the damaged hoarding, proves that you biked that way some time between sunset last evening and first thing this morning."

"Does it?"

"Hang it, don't bluster! We are not saying that you did the damage to that hoarding, but we are dead sure—after the way you have been going on—that you know who did; that you even stood by and allowed her to—"

"Are you meaning ME?" struck in Thelma haughtily.

"I am, yes!"

"Then I think you are abominably insulting! Dave, will you stand by and let me be accused like this? When I didn't—I did NOT touch the hoarding! If I were a boy," she hissed at Jack, "I'd knock you down!"

"You wouldn't!" Jack laughed. "Because, if you were a boy, I'd be knocking you down first. As it is—Dave Cardew is your chum—let him champion you, quite simple! Since he is so—so gone on you—"

"Oh, dry up!" Dave frowned calmly.

"Shan't!"

"Jack," Polly burst in, "no fighting, I tell you!"

"I'm going to fight him, and you can all clear out!" her infuriated brother raged. "Dave Cardew, you can come somewhere out of sight—"

"We can't fight now."

"Can't?"

"No; you're tired. You look as if you were been running—"

"Never mind about that. I don't care—"

"But I do. Go away now, Jack—"

"Shan't! Gosh, I'll—"

"Jimmy, take him away," said Dave, standing very still.

"Come on, man!" Jimmy pleaded. "He's being fair to you—"

"He's being unfair to the whole holiday crowd—to his sister, above all!" Jack stormed on.

"And I've had enough of it all. I'm through. Send the girls away—"

"No, bekas, zen you will fight all ze more!"

"Dweadful!" wailed Paula. "Oh, deah, oh, deah! Geals, geals—"

"Jimmy," Pam called out, and when he looked at her she shook her head. Oh, so he had been mistaken just now! She hadn't hoped for a fight; she had only smiled because Jack was showing readiness to fight, and Dave was so calm, so obviously unafraid.

"Not now, Jack—"

"Clear off, Jimmy! I tell you he is not going to stand there—gosh!" Jack shouted, whipping off his jacket. "Put 'em up, Dave, put 'em up! Jimmy, you—you— Get away, man!"

"No, come out of it," said Jimmy, simply wrestling with the one who was longing to let fly at Dave. "Not now!"

"Let him have that, then, to make sure of some other time!" Jack panted, and flashed an open hand at Dave, drawing a loud *smack!*

"Oh!" cried Morcove.

The challenging smack had caught Dave across the left cheek.

Then, a ringing cry from someone who was no unit in the excited crowd:

"Stop! Stop!"

They all looked to see who it was, some of them flashing round to do so, and, to their utter amazement and consternation, they saw—Dave's own mother!

Dave Must Go

SHE came flashing up, with Judy at her side.

"Oh—fighting?"

"No, Mrs. Cardew, no—no!"

"Bekas—"

"But there was nearly a fight? We saw, from the window!"

"Hallo, mother!" Dave said quite quietly and fondly. "You here, then!"

"Yes! And well that I have come on this surprise visit," Mrs. Cardew exclaimed, sorrowfully.

"Oh, how terrible, that you, Dave, should be on such bad terms with those who have always been your chums!"

"I know," he acknowledged. "And this, mother, is Thelma Curtis."

Amazing, the composure with which he could introduce the girl! So Morcove was thinking.

Mrs. Cardew inclined her pretty head, that was all. Thelma, quite understanding that she was not approved, managed, all the same, to smile most sweetly.

"Dear Mrs. Cardew, I am so sorry! I am afraid a good deal of it is about me!"

"I am afraid it is. But that does not mean that I need discuss matters with you," said the lady. "Dave, I must have a talk with you at once. It had better be in my room—there we shall be free from disturbance. Judy, just go with Dave and show him up to my room; but I shall not wish you to remain for the talk, dear."

"Very well, mother."

Judy turned to Dave, who at once offered to

walk away with her. He was quite impassive. Their mother waited until the brother and sister had gone indoors, with Thelma airily drifting off in another direction. Then:

"Jack Linton—"

"I say, Mrs. Cardew, I'm frightfully sorry there has been this upset for you. Dashed shame, when you must have come down for a nice time amongst us all. I was in a bat, I admit."

"So long as you feel better now?" she smiled faintly.

"I suppose I do. Anyhow—what do you want, Mrs. Cardew? My word of honour that I won't get fighting with him? All right—"

"There is no need, my dear boy, but it is fine of you all the same. You won't be given an opportunity of being further provoked. Dave will go home, at once."

"What?"

"Oh, yes. I have quite made up my mind about that. Judy will remain, for I am sure she will be happier with all of you, her friends, than she would be at home with Dave, in his present mood. That's all, boys and girls, except—"

Mrs. Cardew's voice became a little emotional now. She was turning to walk away.

"Except that I am deeply grieved that my boy should have been the cause of so much trouble. You must all try to enjoy yourselves better when he has gone."

HALF an hour later Thelma Curtis rushed upstairs in great excitement, to tell her mother something.

It was something that she—Thelma—had overheard only a minute since.

"Mother—"

"Oh, what is it now, Thelma? Bursting in like that!"

"But listen," after a hasty closing of the door. "It is simply splendid for us! I mean, about to-night! That Cardew boy is going home at once."

"He is?"

"Yes! I've just heard some of the girls talking. His mother turned up here this morning—we didn't know, did we? Now there is a fearful row on. In a way, it's a scream. What they think is that he has been sort of struck on me, and Mrs. Cardew has got to know. So she's ordered him home!"

"Then, Thelma, I am very glad! For, really, I have been feeling very uneasy about that boy: afraid to do anything lest he should bob up, even at dead of night, out there on the hills."

"There is not the slightest doubt, mother, he has been playing at private detective. I could tell!"

"Yet what made him suspect, Thelma? That is what I can't make out! How can he possibly have discovered that we're passing under an assumed name, and that we're relations of the Delanes really?"

Mrs. Curtis, asking herself that baffling question again, moved about the room uneasily.

"Oh, well, if he is going," she said at last, and shrugged. "No need to fear his activities any longer—"

"No, mother; that's the scream it is—for us. I fancy he goes directly after tea. So to-night—to-night, for certain, we shall be able to go ahead, knowing that he is safely out of the way. The wonderful boy detective," Thelma tittered, drawing off to the door, "sent home by his mammy, like a naughty kid—he, he, he!"

It kept her tittering as she passed round into

her own bed-room. But then the grin changed to a proud smile.

She was looking at herself in the glass, feeling all the vainer, if that were possible. For, even though Dave Cardew had hung about her for private detection reasons, hadn't his sister and all the other girls been fearfully jealous?

Of course they had! And how nice it was to know it!

After the Parting

"SEEN Jimmy, girls?"
"Jimmy, Pam? Oh, he—he's somewhere about!"

Pam smiled. The half-attentive answer had come from Betty, in talk with Polly and others



The door opened suddenly, and Betty and Polly found themselves face to face with Mrs. Cardew. "Girls, what are you doing here?" she addressed them reprovingly.

out here in the garden. They were talking about Dave, and evidently they could not be bothered, just then, about Jimmy.

But Pam particularly wanted a word with Jimmy.

"I must find him," she remarked, drifting off again.

It was five o'clock. Morcové had come out of doors again directly tea was over. The girls knew, as did Jimmy, Jack, and young Bloot, that Dave had packed his luggage. At any minute now he would be going off with his mother.

Instinctively, Pam made her way round to those outbuildings which were coming into use again for farmstock, now that Mr. Delane—a farmer all his life—was putting up a fight to work the

Cromlech Manor lands, whilst his good wife struggled to run the house itself as a country hotel.

Pam found Jimmy, as she had expected, making himself useful and perhaps a bit dirty, bedding down a calf-pen.

"I hope the bull isn't about, Jimmy?"

"Hallo, Pam! No, he's tied up."

Jimmy could not smile along with Pam at the joking allusion to the bull. He could only blush, wishing it could be forgotten how he had tackled the bull when it got loose yesterday.

"Jimmy, I want to know; you're not going to be off the scene when Dave leaves? You're going to shake hands before he goes?"

"You want me to?"

"Well, Jimmy, it would be going the nice thing?"

"Right-ho, I will. I say. I'm glad you—you decided me," Jimmy blurted out.

"Yes, well, I thought perhaps I had better come, to make sure. You see, Jimmy, if you do that, then Jack will."

"I can't answer for Jack, Pam!"

"Oh, you can do a lot if you try, Jimmy."

"Oh, all right—I'll try. Better go round now, so as not to miss Dave," said Jimmy, making some final strewings of straw. Pam was standing by, and he was aware of her letting a month-old calf suck a couple of her fingers.

"Darling," Pam said to the calf. "There's no frantic hurry, Jimmy. We shall hear the car at the front door."

"But I'm finished now. Hey!" Jimmy clapped his hands at the calf, which skipped back on to its new-made bed. "I say," as they strolled out of the yard together, "how about Polly?"

"We girls can do nothing with Polly. She vows she won't say good-bye to Dave; simply let him go. But it's not right. We understand her feelings, Jimmy. Still!"

"And yet you expect me to persuade Jack—to part friends with Dave?"

"That is-it, Jimmy. You succeed with Jack, and then Polly will take example from him. So, you see," Pam said, with that engaging candour of hers, "I'm getting you to do what I, for one, have failed to do myself. You must always, Jimmy, come to my rescue like that."

"But you haven't failed, Pam! You have succeeded, by getting round me when I was of half a mind not to—"

"Yes; well, then, that's only half a success for me, at best. Jimmy, isn't it awful, Dave having to go home? Best thing no doubt; but—"

"Rotten, yes! Look at it how you like, Pam, it amounts to the same thing. He is as good as being turned out of the 'Co.' But, there, he will

be getting over it all, I suppose, soon enough."
 "Quite likely," Pam nodded. "But what I am wondering—will Polly?"

It was Betty who raced upstairs, presently, anxious to find Polly.

"The car's at the door, Polly. You must come down and say good-bye to him."

"I don't want to."

"But, Polly—"

"I've told you before, Betty; he shouldn't have served us all like this, least of all Judy."

"But listen, Polly. We've been told suddenly that Mrs. Cardew is not going home with him. She is only taking him as far as the station; then she returns, to stay on here with Judy. Just think what that means for Dave. He has got to go home, to be there all alone, except for the servants."

"Well, and serve him— Oh, all right. I suppose I must," Polly suddenly gave in. "If it's to be like that."

"I must say," Betty whispered sadly as they went downstairs together, "it surprises me that Dave's mother can be so severe with him. I could understand her taking him home to be with him there; but to pack him off home, all by himself—"

Abruptly the murmur had to cease, for both girls had reached the bottom flight of stairs to see Dave and Judy alone together in the old hall.

Out of doors were gathered Pam and the rest of the girls, with the three boys. Their being grouped near the car was evidence of the intention to say at least a polite good-bye to that chum who had so fallen in their estimation of late.

Betty and Polly hurried past Judy and Dave and out to the waiting group.

"So good-bye, Judy," Dave said, now that they were alone together again. "I hope the weather keeps fine for you all."

"Before you go, Dave; I never wanted to say things about you to mother. But—"

"She's mother, and, of course, you had to act accordingly. I quite understand, Judy. Don't you go about feeling miserable, as if you had been slanging me. Mother is—mother. What she says—goes!"

He was quite cheerful. For just a second the cheerfulness seemed to Judy a sign of shamelessness, grieving her more than ever.

Then he kissed her good-bye, and all in an instant she could feel only her great love for him as being her own only brother. Whatever else he had been of late, causing such disappointment and sorrow, he was simply her brother to her now, going away from her.

"Good-bye!" she said lumpily. "Dave dear, I—I hope it won't be too lonely for you at home."

He laughed.

"Oh, I'm going to enjoy myself, in my own way."

What a surprise—packet he was!

She looked at him for the last time, her eyes flooding with tears, and then went from him, blindly mounting the stairs to seek her own room.

Dave gnawed a lip for a moment, then, squaring his shoulders, he walked out into the evening sunshine.

Betty at once came to him, offering a parting handshake. One by one the other girls—shook hands with him, until there was only Polly to do so.

Then, to the alarm of Betty and others, it was realised that Polly, after all, felt unable to say

a friendly good-bye. She had reacted to something in her—some tremendous, overpowering feeling of bitter disappointment.

It would have been a noticeable pause, but Pam glanced at Jimmy, who at once stepped to Dave.

"Well, so-long, Dave. Hope you have a nice journey."

"Thanks, Jimmy. So-long! 'Bye, Bobby," as young Bloor offered a podgy paw.

"Polly dear," Betty urged in a whisper. "Now, Polly!"

But she shook her head, seemed ready to turn away. At this instant, however, her brother walked up to Dave.

"Dashed fool you've been, Dave, but, anyhow—see you after the hols," said Jack, holding out that hand which had been clenched to strike Dave only a short while ago. "Ta-ta."

"Bye, Jack!"

Dave took his underlip between his teeth again. After the briefest wait—yet how noticeable the pause was—he went to the car, aware of Polly's having finally turned away.

Then suddenly she relented once again. She turned round to come back. Her chums broke into smiles, after looking most distressed.

And this—this of all moments—was the one for Thelma Curtis to come running out by the front door, crying:

"Oh, are you off, Dave? Cheerio, then! Good-bye, and best of luck!"

Hang the girl! Now Polly was bound to walk away.

"Write to me, won't you?" Thelma said gaily to Dave, as he stood ready to enter the car. "I shall see you again, some time!"

"Oh, I hope so!"

Were they to have more to say to each other, after that? If so, neither Morcove nor the three boys wished to hear. Not likely—after that!

It was with a look of revived fury that Jack turned round and went stamping off. Jimmy and Bobby went with him. The Morcove girls—they also heeled about and walked quickly away.

"Gosh!" Jack could be heard saying to himself, in a fire-eating way. "It's the limit!"

Perhaps because Polly had gone round to the garden behind the house, these others went that way. They were on one of the lawns, standing about in scattered twos and threes, painfully mute, when they heard the dying-away whine of a car.

"Well," Jack said then, fiercely. "He's gone! So come on, boys—tennis, cricket, any old thing you like."

"But how about Judy?" sighed Betty. "She won't want to play."

"I'll go indoors and be with Judy," Polly said, again walking away very quickly. "I'd like to."

And, understanding, they let her go in silence, feeling a sadness too deep for words.

The Hoot of An Owl

HOW late in the night it was Betty Barton did not know. She had opened her eyes more than once after a bit of a doze, but suddenly she heard a peevish:

"Dash! I can't get to sleep!"

It was Polly, giving an impatient shaking up to her pillow.

"I say, dear," Betty whispered, for Paula and Naomer were sharing this room, and they were certainly asleep, "the moon has come round to this side of the house. Shall I draw the curtains a bit closer?"

"Oh, it's not that, Betty, thanks; it is—I don't know!"

But Betty knew. It seemed as well, however, not to express understanding. She slipped out of bed and padded first to one window and then another, silently drawing the hangings together so as to keep out the all-too-brilliant moonlight.

She was arranging the last pair of curtains so as to allow for good ingress of air through the open window, when she gave a violent start.

"Here, Polly," she whispered, a few moments later, without looking round, "come and see! But quietly, for goodness' sake!"

Quickly out of bed and at her chum's side, Polly asked under her breath:

"Where? What?"

Betty pointed.

"To the left, down there in the garden; but you can't see her now. Wait, though, and perhaps there will be a sign of her again."

"Her?"

"Thelma Curtis," was Betty's sensational response, in a deep whisper. "I'm positive! Too big for any of our chums. Besides, why should any one of them go out of doors at this time of night? There, Polly, quick!"

"I see her, yes!"

After a few seconds, the two girls drew back a step or so from the window, lest that midnight prowler down there in the moonlit garden might cast a wary glance up to all the windows on this side of the old house.

"This is strange," Betty said, in the same deep whisper. "Thelma crept out of doors like this, at dead of night, once before, we know."

"She had her mother with her that other time. Is Mrs. Curtis also on the prowl again to-night?"

Cautiously the mystified pair peeped again, but there was only Thelma to be seen—if Thelma it was. And somehow Betty and Polly felt certain. Perhaps because this was the second time it had happened, they could not imagine it to be anyone else—one of the servants, for instance.

Suddenly Polly nudged Betty.

"I shall dress and go down, Betty," the whisper came.

"Then I shall do the same. Really, I think we ought to find out, if we can, what it means."

"Those Curtises stay on, although they grumble about the place," Polly softly ruminated during the hurried dressing. "And we know they don't pay the bill. It goes on mounting up. I've heard of people flitting by night, leaving a big bill owing."

Betty nodded. She could have said much in furtherance of what her chum had suggested, but there was that risk of waking Paula and Naomer.

So, without so much as another whisper, even, the two crept downstairs as soon as they were dressed, carrying their shoes. Only when, in the darkness, they had come to a ground-floor door that was slightly ajar, did they put on their shoes.

That done, they stole out, ears and eyes all on the alert.

The moonlight night was calm. Not a tree soured to prevent the girls from picking up any sound, however faint, such as a stealthy footfall. There was a total stillness that made them all the more cautious themselves, as they worked round to where guests' cars were garaged—in the range of old coach-houses.

Mrs. Curtis possessed a car, and that was why Betty and Polly were investigating in this direction.

But they found the makeshift garages all locked up.

This seemed to dispose of the theory that mother and daughter might have been meaning

to get away, leaving a big bill unpaid. It even caused Betty and Polly to feel that that theory had been a rather stupid one, anyhow. But its abandonment now left them wondering only all the more—what DID it mean?

Thelma, out and about again to-night and, for all they knew, her mother was with the girl—same as that other night!

The puzzled schoolgirls had stood at a loss for fully two minutes when Betty whispered:

"It will never do for us to stay here, Polly, nor yet to go off on a scout round. Supposing we go back to that house door in the end, to find ourselves locked out?"

"My goodness, that would be lively," Polly gasped. "But we're not going back to bed yet, Betty? How if we stay around out of doors, but close to the door that's unlocked? Then we could be sure of slipping in before anyone else?"

"That's the idea. After all, Polly, we don't know which way to scout now. There's no sign of anyone. But it may lead to something if we stand by."

"See which way she—or the pair of them, if it's the mother as well—comes back."

"Yes."

So they returned, on tiptoe, keeping out of the moonlight whenever possible. In a dark corner, where a water-butt offered to screen them, they finally crouched down together.

The door by which they had crept out of the house was close at hand. As they had found it ajar when they came down from their room, they were entitled to believe that Thelma had gone out by that way and would make for it on her return.

But where—where was she now? What doing? On and on the two juniors waited, still hearing nothing, glimpsing nothing that could be associated with this midnight mystery.

At last Polly lost patience.

"Let me take a look round, Betty, and you go indoors, so as to be on the safe side—I mean, in case I get locked out. Then you could unlock and let me in."

"Right-ho."

So they parted, Betty stealing towards the house door, whilst Polly warily tiptoed off upon the intended prowl.

But they had been only a few moments apart when Betty was hissing an urgent recall that brought Polly nipping to her, in front of that door.

"It's locked now, Polly!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"We're done. Whoever was out of doors before us has already gone in again—locking the door."

"My goodness, Betty! Whatever shall we do?"

"Bothered if I know!"

And there they stood, utterly aghast at the awkward fix they were in.

LOCKED out! At this dead time of night the pair of them faced with a bolted door which they had thought to be on the latch merely, offering safe retreat at any moment!

There was amazement for them, as well as dismay, because it was evident that Thelma had sneaked indoors again so very stealthily, just now, for them to have remained unaware of this. She had returned, of course, before they went on watch at the water-butt.

Betty found her mind running more upon all this than upon the problem, urgent though it was, as to how Polly and she were to get indoors again.

"I like the look of it less and less, Polly. The greater the secrecy and stealth, the more suspicious it becomes. You can understand anyone, coming downstairs for innocent reasons, being as quiet as possible for fear of rousing others, but Thelma must have been creeping!"

Polly nodded.

"And that's the girl, Betty, whom Dave has been so gone on! Oh, bother, it's no use talking about that, of course. We have got to do something. Can't climb up to the bed-room window?"

"Out of the question, but, look here, we might fetch a ladder—that is, if we can't find a ground-floor window that will open. I know where there's a ladder. But first, we will go all round the house, to see if—"

She checked her whispering. For the first time since they had come out into the moonlit night, a sound had come—a slow, faint, *tu-whoo, tu-whoo-oo!*

"That's only an owl," Polly fumed.

"The hoot of an owl, Polly—sometimes imitated, as being a signal to give in the night."

"You mean—gosh, shall we wait a bit, then?"

"It's worth it!"

TU-WHOO! *Tu-whoo-oo!*

The mournful, eerie cry again, from closer at hand this time. The owl—if owl it was—had floated upon his silent pinions to an old elm on the edge of the spacious garden.

Betty and Polly stood peering in that direction, their ears straining hard. It was so exactly like the hoot of an owl unless some other sound came they must conclude that it really was only the bird of the night, hawking around for food.

And then, suddenly, a thing happened that gave them a surprise to be remembered as long as they would live. A voice spoke from behind them—addressed them softly:

"Girls, what are you doing here?"

They flashed round.

The house door that had been locked against them was standing open, and they were face to face with—Mrs. Cardew!

"**BETTY!** Polly! What DOES this mean?"

"Oh—er—we—er—we both came down, Mrs. Cardew," stammered Betty. "Wondering why someone else had slipped out of doors."

"Someone else? Who could that be, then?"

"We think—the Curtis girl."

"Oh?"

"But she must have gone in again, and so we got locked out. Er—that's all."

"It is a very great deal, girls, for me to find you like this. Supposing I had not come down?"

To-whoo! once again, from among the larger-trees bordering the garden. *Tu-whoo-oo!*

"Go in now, girls, and go up to your room—back to your beds at once," Mrs. Cardew said with calm authority. "I have not slept yet; I have been thinking about my boy."

"Are you going out to shoot that owl away, Mrs. Cardew?" Polly asked softly. "So that he won't keep you awake?"

"I'll see that the sound doesn't bother any of us any more. Go up, as I told you—please!"

"Very well, Mrs. Cardew," Betty said lamely.

"Good-night. Is it very late?"

"Past twelve."

"Oh, dear!"

They passed along a dark passage, came to the stairs and mounted silently. Back in their bed-room, they found Naomer and Paula still sleeping soundly.

"How decent Mrs. Cardew was about it," Betty whispered. "She'll have something to say to us in the morning, of course. Past midnight, and she hadn't been to sleep—thinking about Dave."

Polly muttered an irritable:

"Like me!"

"And now, I suppose, we're to lie awake, thinking of Thelma Curtis and wondering—what has it all meant?"

But if they did that they were just as mystified in the end. For, as long as they remained awake nothing happened that could have helped their puzzled minds to arrive at any conclusion.

Nor did the hooting of the owl come again.

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

YOUR
ab
lighted
from y
ever y
write.
dress i
S ch o
O w n,
Fleetw
Farring
London
A sta
dressed
must be
for a w

SUNSHINE AFTER STORM

As soon as the mystery is cleared up the Morcove and Grangemoor chums proceed to make the most of the holiday. Next week's fine story is rich in thrilling incidents and happy holiday fun, and is entitled:—

MORCOVE MAKES MERRY!

COMPLETE
NEXT
TUESDAY



BY
MARJORIE
STANTON