

“MAUREEN'S PARTY PROBLEM”—Complete Inside

The SCHOOLGIRLS' 2^D OWN



**The Track of the
Kidnappers' Car**

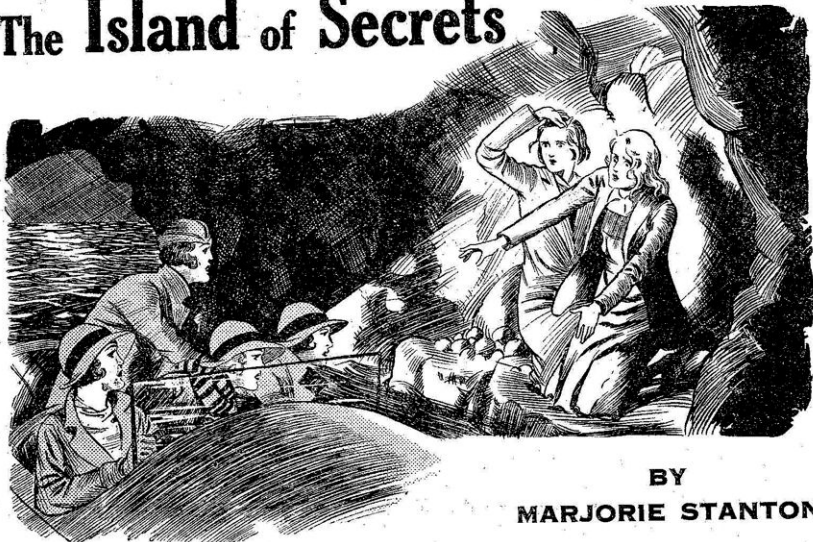
A Dramatic Incident
From the Grand Long
Morcove Story in This
Issue.

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Week ending
October 26th, 1935.
EVERY TUESDAY.

“HER HARUM-SCARUM HIGHNESS”—Complete Fun-Story

Magnificent LONG COMPLETE Story of the Chums of Morcove, in Which
Ex-captain Betty Barton Leads a Dramatic Quest to—

The Island of Secrets



BY
MARJORIE STANTON

Betty's Sensational Return

"NO talking, girls! No whispering! Go on with your work!"

Miss Merrick, seated in front of her scholars in a class-room at Morcove School, had been compelled to speak at last.

More and more, during one of those writing tasks which should mean perfect silence except for the racing of pens, sibilant sounds had increased.

It was an excitable whispering—mostly behind hands—which had begun when Polly Linton and several other girls chanced to get a slanting glance out of the window, unnoticed by Miss Merrick.

By now, the whole Form knew what only a few of its members had seen just then; so it really did not matter that Miss Merrick had put a stop to all the whispering.

But Polly Linton, after writing a couple more lines without making any use of her lips, suddenly found the silence insupportable. It was too much like the hush before a storm.

So she threw down her pen and calmly invited the Form-mistress to take note of this minor revolt against work.

"Well, Polly, what is it?"

"She is coming in now, Miss Merrick—Betty is!"

"I am quite aware of that, Polly. Go on with your work! The whole class—continue!"

For, when Polly rested her pen almost every other girl in the desks had done the same. Five and twenty girls at least had been bursting to

tell Miss Merrick what she already knew. Simply for the sake of ending the strain that silence meant!

For every pen taken up again, there was now a loud sigh. Many a nib acquired a fierce scratching sound; as for Polly, she soon broke her nib. Well! She simply could not go on with the essay, she didn't see why she should! And, whilst rebellious Polly very leisurely cast about for a fresh nib, other girls managed to find the inkwells yielding up hindering blobs.

Miss Merrick could not have been blind to this

**It is Betty Herself, Victim of
the Denver Sisters' Plotting,
Who Sets Out to Save Them!**

general determination not to do another stroke; but she was not the sort of mistress to take drastic action. There had been so much to-day to prevent girls from concentrating upon lessons.

Suddenly the class-room door opened and a girl belonging to this Form walked in, still wearing her outdoor things. The winter jacket and the Morcove hat glistened with moisture condensed from the white fog which had hung over the district this last four-and-twenty hours.

"Oh, don't come in here, Betty—"

"I thought I had better let you know—"

"You had better let the headmistress know, Betty! Silence, there in the desks!"

Miss Merrick was a bad hand at being bleak and sharp, even with a delinquent. She had forced herself, just then, to treat Betty Barton very frigidly; but now, as that girl turned back to the class-room door—the heart of Miss Merrick softened.

"Come here, then, Betty! Since you have presented yourself in the class-room—when we are almost ready to dismiss for the afternoon—where have you been?"

"Oh, I can't very well explain, Miss Merrick. But I felt I ought to report here to you, in case you hadn't seen me coming up the drive."

"After being away from the school since half-past twelve! A day like this, too! I don't mean only the weather—the fog. Isn't there enough anxiety in the school about Fay and Edna Denver being missing, that you must go off and leave us to wonder what has happened to you?"

"I am sorry about any anxiety—"

"Sorry!" cried the mistress, whilst looking more sorry than angry herself. "Really, Betty Barton, ever since this term started, you have been—most trying! I shall say no more, but take you to the headmistress at once. I had better be there!"

Miss Merrick always liked to do her best for a miscreant, that was why she intended to accompany Betty to the Head. She looked very distressed as she faced the class, which was now not simply whispering but loud with talk.

"Girls, girls, now come! Etta Hargrove, please stand out here in my absence and keep order."

Etta Hargrove, upon whom the Form captaincy—taken away from Betty recently—had been bestowed by the headmistress, walked out to be in charge. A level-headed girl, she was without the slightest trace of officiousness.

Etta looked, indeed, as if she far from relished being "clothed in a little brief authority." Not that her authority was likely to be brief, after all. That had been the first intention; but Betty Barton had gone from bad to worse during the last few days, in the eyes of Miss Somerfield.

As Miss Merrick passed from the class-room, with Betty, there was dead silence, but no sooner had they gone than all tongues broke loose.

It was almost an uproar. And there stood Etta, in front of the class, quite incapable of quelling the babel, as she had known she would be.

"I do wonder, though! Has Betty done some good, girls?" Polly asked. "Gosh, how I long to get hold of her in Study 12, to hear!"

"If she is allowed to come to the study," Judy Cardew muttered gravely. "But, this time—Miss Somerfield will be furious!"

"Yes, bai Jove! Poor Betty," grieved Paula Creel. "Most distressing; but a great relief she has come in, anyhow—yes, wather!"

"I say, Polly—" But Bunny Trevor could not gain Polly's attention now.

Certain jokes being loudly made about Betty, by some of the girls, to the accompaniment of peals of laughter, had caused hot-headed Polly to stand up, glaring protestingly.

"Sit down, Polly," the captain requested.

"What! And there are those girls over there, saying things—"

"I know—"

"Well, then!"

"You keep calm," the new captain advised Polly; whereupon the ribald element started some subdued cheering.

"Stop that row, over there!"

"But, Etta—please!" And there was renewed giggling and tittering at Eva Merrick's extreme politeness in standing up to address the captain.

"You must make allowance—"

"I am making allowance! But don't you girls make idiots of yourselves!"

"It's so wonderful—we mean, about Betty!" called out another facetious spirit.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Detective Betty!"

"That's right, ha, ha, ha!"

"And won't the police be jealous!"

"Must buy the 'Barncombe Herald' next week! Portrait of Betty, on the front page!"

More laughter, whilst Polly and Bunny, and one or two other devoted chums of Betty, looked ready to rush between the desks to fall upon the mockers.

"With special supplement—words and music!" cried Eva Merrick. Then, standing up, she flourished a ruler like a conductor's baton.

"Doh!" she gave the note.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"All together, girls! 'There was—'"

And the singing started:

"There was a young girl named Betty,
Distinctly more clever than pretty!
She wore out her shoes
In hunting for clues—"

Nicely in unison, the choir had got as far as that, when the maddened chums of derided Betty came charging across to put their own stop upon the singing.

In the case of Polly and Bunny, intervening desks were obstacles not to be so much gone round as gone over.

They could be seen taking flying leaps from one desk to another, whilst rightful occupants dodged to be out of the way. At the same time, Pam Willoughby, Madge Minden, Judy Cardew and Helen Craig, all charged with great spirit, if less skittishly.

As for Naomer, she had first to get up from the floor, after falling over Paula, before going into battle like a yelling Dervish.

The "Betty baiters" tried to stop the attack by hurling books. But in a moment Betty's chums were doing what they had so longed to do during the last few days. They were going for Eva Merrick and Co.—that is to say, at least a dozen girls. It was a by no means playful set-to. A few moments, and it was a riot, which the new captain could only deal with by shouting:

"Dismiss!"

Magical word! The last flung schoolbook came fluttering down; all scuffling and pushing ceased. Instantly the rival factions were demobilising.

Miss Massingham, belonging to the Fifth Form, suddenly appeared in the doorway, angrily demanding what all the noise was about. Etta Hargrove said that they were dismissing—that was all. And the Form confirmed this explanation by a hasty and decorous putting away of books.

Which done, the Form—still under the frowning eyes of grim Miss Massingham—demurely walked out, doing its best to keep straight faces!

On the Trail

A GLOOMY Study 12 it was where, presently, tea was being laid for the usual number of girls.

And gloomy were the looks of most of those

girls, gloomy their talk, Betty Barton being still awaited.

Not only was there an ugly possibility of her not turning up at all; these loyal chums of hers were afflicted with a horrible misgiving—even if she did turn up, she might simply have to tell them that she was in worse disgrace than ever!

"Botheration!" Polly fumed, and set down a cake-platter all the more violently because of her irritable mood. "How I do wish Betty had got some of us to go with her, when she went off like that before dinner!"

"Well, you know what she is!" Pam murmured. "From the very first evening when she got into hot water, it has been her constant care not to get us mixed up in it all."

"Vewy eweditable, I must say, geals——"

"Go on, tell me something I don't know!" Polly rounded upon elegant Paula Creel. "Instead of helping to get the tea! But after this, anyway, I, for one, am not going to let Betty out of my sight!"

"Hear, hear," cried Bunny. "Sink or swim together, I say."

"Shouldn't wonder if Betty is already sunk," Tess Trelawney grimaced. "If Miss Merrick could speak as she did, we can imagine what Miss Somerfield will be like."

"Bekas——"

"We don't want anything from you, kid!" disgruntled Polly now fell foul of Naomer. "And stop picking currants off the cake!"

"What ze diggings, Polly, no need to be such a cross-patch! Bekas——"

"It's a rotten term, I say! And I'm fed-up!" Polly raged, and then turned Paula out of the best armchair so as to flop down into it herself. "We've seen Betty deprived of the captaincy—most unfairly. We've seen her baited by other girls—made fun of from morning to night! And now—why doesn't she come in, so that we can know? What's going to happen to her now?"

"Perhaps a grand comeback!" Judy suggested, with desperate optimism. "Perhaps even now she is being thanked by Miss Somerfield for having found out something——"

"About Fay and Edna, what's become of them?" Bunny caught Judy up. "Some hopes! Personally, I could not see any signs of triumph in Betty's looks, when she came into the class-room——"

"Neither could I——"

"Well, if you couldn't, don't keep on about it!" Polly stormed. "Here, give me the jug and I'll go for hot water. And I hope I run into Eva Merrick or one of her lot! I'll jolly well crack the jug over her head."

"The jug," said Bunny, "is cracked enough as it is; and so is Eva Merrick. Hark! Oh," as a familiar step sounded, "here's Betty, at last!"

It was so. Polly, whipping open the study door, let in the ex-captain, whose smile was a stoical one. Slam! Polly drove shut the door, and then Betty was instantly aware of the more than friendly interest her chums were displaying.

"Haven't you had tea yet, girls?"

"Without you? The idea!"

Then Betty's smile came back.

"But you had to have dinner without me, didn't you? Oh, of course, it was pretty good cheek of me to stay away like that. But I hoped to be able to do some good—find out something——"

"And didn't you?" Polly panted.

"Nothing that it was the least use my telling Miss Somerfield about," was the shrugged answer. "You girls are different, of course. And so——"

"And so—what, Betty, what?" they clamoured. "Out with it!"

"I have been spending most of the time since halfpast twelve scouting after somebody on the moor. It's pretty mucky out there in this fog, and that's why I thought it so much stranger that Elsa Vanderloo should be there——"

"Elsa Vanderloo!"

Those who echoed the name showed by their looks how much it meant to them.

"Yes, girls. And, after all, I don't know what



Suddenly Betty looked at her chums. Her voice was tense with excitement when she spoke. "If the Denver girls WERE kidnapped," she said, "then where are their cycles?" "Why," began Pam breathlessly, "you mean——" "I mean!" Betty almost snapped—"Find those cycles and we're on the track of the Denvers! "

took her on to the moor," Betty ruefully continued. "For two hours I have been watching her, seeing her in the fog turning this way and that, prowling here and there—"

"Waiting for somebody who didn't turn up?" Polly quickly hazarded.

Betty shook her head, sighed, and sat down. "I don't know! At times, I thought that might be it; at other moments I wondered if she was looking for something she had lost on the moor, with a faint idea as to where it might be. Anyhow, in the end she gave it up and went back to Cliff Edge bungalow. And then I came back to the school."

"She hasn't seen you, Betty?"
"Oh, no. I managed to dodge her all the time. It was not easy, because owing to the fog I had to keep pretty close to her."

"And about all this—you said nothing to Miss Somerfield just now?" Madge exclaimed.

"No. What would have been the use? It had all come to nothing. She would only have gone on at me again for having 'silly ideas' about the Vanderloos. As it was, she guessed that I had been playing at 'amateur detective,' as she called it, and was furious."

For a few moments there was an unhappy silence in the study. Then Betty, standing up, resumed:

"I wish now I'd never been Form captain—"
"Oh, Betty!"

"But I do. Somehow, my having sort of stood so well with Miss Somerfield—it has made it almost more than I can bear, to have her pitching into me like this. When she talks of not expelling me straight away, because of my past record—"

"She hasn't talked of expelling you, Betty!" several of them gasped.

"I—I mayn't be seeing this term out," was the husky answer which increased the listeners' consternation. "Miss Somerfield is writing to mother about me— Oh, well, I'm keeping you all from your tea."

"You need yours badly," Judy said, and hastily took up the jug to go away for boiling water. After her exit, another silence prevailed.

"Ah, those Denver sisters!" Polly suddenly exploded. "It's all their fault, I say—"

"Shh, Polly, when they are missing, and we don't know—"

"I don't care, either! It's all their doing, Betty, that this term's been so miserable for you. If they've come to grief, it's over those Vanderloo people at the bungalow. And yet Miss Somerfield says 'No!' Oh, she is quite satisfied—"

"My dear old Polly," Betty laughed mirthlessly. "Miss Somerfield made her own inquiries and simply had to rest satisfied, and that's all there is to it. But I—I can't help it if I have stuck to my belief that the Vanderloos really have had something to do with the Denver girls' vanishing."

After a pause she exclaimed:

"No news of them yet?"

"None!" her chums answered.

"Out there on the moor," Betty pursued, "I wondered at first if Elsa Vanderloo were making for some place where they had Fay and Edna as prisoners for some reason or other. But Elsa didn't make for any definite place, you see; she was simply poking about, as if trying to find something."

"Then what could it have been?" Pam wondered aloud.

Judy came back, putting an end to a thoughtful silence. The light was waning, and yet when Madge went to switch on the electric, she desisted.

"How awful it is," she murmured, "this wretched day nearly ended, and still no news of those two girls. Somehow, I hate the idea of lighting up—drawing the curtains—"

"If the fog would only lift!" Helen said. "It is so hampering the police, we know."

"It's thinning a bit now, I fancy," spoke Tess, looking out of the window. "A bit of a breeze is getting up, and that may blow the mist right away."

Betty and Pam joined Tess at the window, whilst others saw to the tea-making and set the chairs round.

To stand looking out into the blurring mist was to be able to see only half as far as the school's boundary hedge. There should have been fully another hour of daylight to come; but unless the fog cleared, night would shut down over land and sea before its time.

Pam and Tess were thinking: what hope, now, of any news between now and bed-time, to end the great suspense!

As for Betty, her eyes saw, in fancy, through the baffling fog that part of the moor, less than a mile away, where she had so desperately "shadowed" Elsa Vanderloo.

That patient, difficult vigil—all for nothing!

The chums sat down to their tea, in little mood for any of the happy chatter which usually followed the passing round of cups.

There were thoughts of Fay and Edna, how those two wayward girls might have met with some really terrible fate; and there were thoughts of all the backwash of trouble for Betty that the sisters' activities had caused of late.

Suddenly Betty put down her cup.

"My goodness—girls, I say!"

"Well, what, Betty?"

"Their bicycles!" She pushed back her chair and rose. "Why didn't I think of it before!"

"You mean—?" Polly jerked.

"Elsa Vanderloo—perhaps she was out there on the moor, looking to make sure that no traces of a struggle remained!" was Betty's response.

"Fay and Edna were last seen riding away from the school on their bikes. If the sisters were caught by the Vanderloos and taken away—the machines would have to be disposed of. What was done with the bicycles? Are they hidden somewhere now, out on the moor?"

"And Elsa went there this afternoon to make sure that they were still safely hidden?" Pam carried on the reasoning. "Could you see Elsa all the while you were scouting after her, Betty?"

"Not every moment—no. Sometimes I lost her for a whole minute or so in the fog. Girls, I am going down to find Miss Merrick—I must, and chance more snubs. Not that she is one to do that," Betty added. "But there has been so much pooh-poohing of all my ideas."

Five minutes later, the ex-captain was back in Study 12.

"Miss Merrick has decided to get me to take her out to the moor. You're to come, too, Polly—"

"Oh!"

"And you, Pam—"

"Very well," said Pam serenely.

"What about me?" shriled Naomer. "Bekas—"

"Not you, dear, I'm afraid!"

"Sweendle!"

And it was certain that Betty and the chosen two, as they hurried away, left Naomer taking her revenge for being left out of the adventure, by punishing the cakes worse than ever!

A little of the wan daylight seemed to be re-

turning as Betty and Polly and Pam, with Miss Merrick, went out by the school's main gateway.

There was a slight clearing-off of the heavy mist at last—due, as Tess had predicted, to the springing up of a breeze from off the sea.

But conditions were extremely dreary, and at the best these three girls and their Form-mistress knew that only a half-hour of daylight remained to them.

Expecting to be overtaken by darkness before they had been ten minutes on that part of the moor where Elsa Vanderloo had so strangely drifted about during the afternoon, they had provided themselves with pocket torches.

"How I wish I had thought about the bicycles before!" Betty deplored, as they footed it briskly along the road. "Then it would have been something worth mentioning to Miss Somerfield."

"It certainly makes a big difference, Betty; that's why I at once decided to follow it up. I've left word for Miss Somerfield, why we have set off like this."

The headmistress had gone in by car to Barncombe, in connection with the mystery of Fay and Edna's disappearance. She might be back before the Form-mistress and her three companions returned; there was no certainty.

"The fog is going, at last!" Polly emphatically commented, a few minutes later. "Why, look, you can see the bungalow from here, even though there's such little daylight left!"

"Then I hope no one there will see us," Betty said.

For, even now, they were where they must leave the highway to strike aside on to the fringe of the vast moor. It was the spot from which Elsa, earlier in the day, had roamed away into the mist-drenched heather.

There were lighted windows at the bungalow, with curtains drawn as if to shut out such a depressing twilight as it was. This enabled the three girls and Miss Merrick to hope that no watching eyes were likely to be there. It was possible the Vanderloos were at tea.

All the same, they were very quick and cautious in taking to the moor, and there was a feeling of thankfulness when the rough ground, with all that grew so rankly over it, provided them ample cover.

Betty took the lead, guiding the others by a rather zig-zag course the same way that Elsa had gone. Soon they came to a tract of waste land where that young woman had done so much aimless "poking about," as Betty had called it.

It was nearly dark by now, and they made use of one torch. The evening was sufficiently murky for all this casting about to be done with the aid of the bright ray, without any fear of their being discovered from the bungalow. They were quite out of sight of that dwelling and could not be seen even by passers-by on the road. But, of course, the torch was always kept shining close to the ground.

To the intense relief of all four investigators, that strong beam was better than daylight for the purpose that had taken them there. It was amazing how the torchlight brought out clearly signs that might never have been observable by day.

Frequently the electric ray revealed where Elsa had gone this way and that, the trail being clearly shown by her having trodden moisture out of the spongy turf or swept it from heather and brambles by the hem of her coat.

But they found only the trail and nothing—nothing to suggest why she had so persistently hung about just here.

They were not forgetting to look out for a place showing signs of bicycles having been at least temporarily hidden there; but nothing like this came about.

It was at last a comfort to know that as yet no signs of kidnapping had turned up, although the mystery surrounding the sisters' disappearance remained as baffling as ever.

At last Betty had to say that they had gone over all the ground which Elsa had haunted during the afternoon. So the only thing to be done was to return to the school. Miss Merrick made it quite clear that she did not blame Betty for having brought her and the others out upon a wild-goose chase. But all three girls could imagine what the Form would have to say about this latest "exploit" by "Detective Betty."

Polly's temper was aroused once more. She always was unable to submit calmly to a disappointment. And on top of the present disappointment there was the thought of all the renewed baiting of Betty in store for that luckless chum, at bed-time. The Form would be certain to have found out about this "clue hunting"—all for nothing, too!

"We must go back, girls; but we may as well go back by the road over the moor," Miss Merrick suggested. "It will bring us out on to the main road, and it will save us a lot of needless wading through this drenching heather."

She switched off the torch, the battery of which had almost expended itself, and then Betty switched on one which had not yet been used. By its strong light they were able to pick their way towards the by-road, avoiding trailing brambles and much of the sopping bracken.

There was, perhaps, only another hundred yards for them to flounder along, over the rough waste, when Betty stopped dead, emitting a startled cry.

"Just a moment! Hasn't something been happening here?"

Clue Upon Clue

HER outstretched hand shone the torch steadily upon the ground just in front of them all.

Her companions, as they eagerly scanned that disc of illuminated heather and bracken, saw that it was in a trampled state.

Some of the dying bracken had been broken off at the base of brittle stems. The heather looked knocked about and disarrayed.

Then Polly, stooping to get a closer look, drew attention to some blackberry "runners" that had been severed as if by a foot catching in them.

"And some of this bracken," was Pam's discovery, a moment later, "has been pulled up, to be thrown down again."

"To cover something?" Betty suggested tensely.

"The bicycles?" Miss Merrick exclaimed. "Oh, now I am so thankful that we came out, girls! We are close to the moorland road just here. Perhaps this is where the bicycles, brought from the road, were placed—with bracken to hide them for the time being!"

"Then let's explore the road," Polly urged, starting to flounder on again. "Hardly any traffic at this time of year. The road may tell us something."

"Yes!"

"This soft weather—good for tracks," Betty muttered hopefully, as they all rushed to get on to the by-road. "Look for marks of bike-wheels that don't go any farther."

"That's it."

And just such marks as these they discovered, as soon as they emerged upon the road. The

torch wielded by Betty revealed them distinctly—marks made by bicycle tyres in the soft surface.

Two bicycles had come as far as this, just lately, from the direction of the main road, and had come only as far as this.

"You can tell how the machines wobbled just before they stopped," Betty said, whilst flashing the torch over the road.

"Some footprints, too—some of them girls' footprints," Miss Merrick said excitedly. "Oh, it begins to appear certain—"

"And what about this?" came Betty's interrupting cry. "Why, there was a car, and it stopped just here. Long enough to let a drop of oil or so spot the ground."

"Then it went on again," Pam muttered, "in the direction of Stormwood and Swanlake. But it came back, by the look of it! There are enough lines of tyre-marks to account for a return over the same ground."

"The car came back, after taking the girls—where?" Betty questioned. "Here, Miss Merrick, can't we go along the road in the direction of Stormwood, just to see?"

"We certainly will!"

But they were not to have to go far. Less than a couple of hundred yards had they ranged along, and then—

"Look!" Betty called out, checking abruptly. The torch showed them criss-crossing tyre-marks, as if a car had backed to turn round.

"This is the first place they got to where they could turn," Betty said, speaking more to herself than her companions; but the latter were paying heed and nodding. "After picking up Fay and Edna, they came as far as this to turn, where there was only grass beside the road. You can see where the back wheels went on to the grass."

"Yes!"

"If only we could be sure that it was a car belonging to the Vanderloos!" exclaimed Miss Merrick.

"And we may be able to find that out," Betty was ready to answer astutely. "Go along to the bungalow and, if the car is there, compare the tyre-threads with these marks."

"I'd like some of the girls who have been laughing at you, Betty, to be here now!" Polly gritted. "They would—"

"Oh, never mind about them," the ex-captain struck in. "We're getting on; that's all that matters."

"It is indeed," Miss Merrick murmured fervently. "Let's go to the bungalow!"

To the three girls, who would have done the half-mile to the main road at a run, had they been by themselves, it seemed very trying to have to keep to the pace set by Miss Merrick. As a matter of fact, she took them along with her at a very brisk step.

Eager haste put a check upon speculative talk. Having exchanged few remarks, they came out upon the nightbound highway running between Morcove and the town.

Betty switched off the torch, and in silence and groping darkness they bore towards the bungalow gateway, a little way along the road.

The cliff-top dwelling, when they got to it, was outwardly just the same as they had last glimpsed it. Curtains were drawn cosily across windows showing lamplight; everything was suggestive of a snug settling down for a long evening indoors. At the outbuildings—the garage and some other sheds—there was neither light nor sign of life.

"Hadn't we better keep off the gravel and walk on the grass?" Betty whispered, as they turned in at the gateway. "My idea would be

to creep round to where they keep their car, and if it's there, take a squint at the tyres. But then, my ideas—"

"Your ideas are all right, Betty; at least, that one is," the Form-mistress guardedly voiced; and then Polly nudged Pam, who gave her serene smile.

Polly was not alone in exulting over the impression Betty had made upon Miss Merrick, in the last hour or so!

Pushing their footsteps, they avoided the porch and stole round to that side of the bungalow where a couple of useful-looking sheds fronted the garage. This latter was locked up, but one of the sheds had its door wedged wide open, and inside stood a large, unwashed saloon car.

Betty's torch still had some current left. She switched it on again, and all four of them eagerly inspected the car's tyres.

"They're the ones!" Polly breathed excitedly. "That's the tread to leave marks like those we saw on the road!"

"Only," Betty demurred, "it's a popular make of tyre. What about it, Miss Merrick? I know what I should do now! But—" And she let a grin say the rest.

"Ah, Betty, you may well smile," sighed Miss Merrick. "It looks as if you are to have the laugh of those who have been laughing at you. There is, after all, something in your belief that the Vanderloos were concerned in Fay and Edna's disappearance. And now—we will go to their door and ring."

Polly nudged both Betty and Pam this time, whilst doing a moment's step-dancing.

"Hooray!" Polly softly rejoiced. "Nothing like it! Take the bull by the horns!"

Miss Merrick, a minute later, stabbed a finger against a bell-press in the bungalow porch.

She and the girls had heard voices. There was complete silence after the ring at the bell; and then movements sounded; a light came on in the hall.

The door opened, and a young man of intellectual appearance stood revealed, saying with only a slightly foreign accent:

"Good-evening! From Morcove School—is that it?"

An Hour to Go!

"YES! We wish to see Mrs. Vanderloo, if she is in? But if not—you or your sister will do."

"We are all at home," Osbert Vanderloo remarked, quite calmly. "Come in, by all means."

He went before them to the sitting-room doorway, announcing them to his aunt and sister, who, as the Morcove girls noticed, rose without any sign of alarm.

"You are a mistress, I presume?" Osbert Vanderloo said Miss Merrick, in that level tone of his.

Betty and her two chums knew afterwards that Miss Merrick shared their own uncomfortable feeling—at interrupting such a peaceful, homely little gathering. The aunt, with her niece and nephew, enjoying conversation before a warm fire and the curtains drawn against the outer darkness.

"I am these girls' Form-mistress—Miss Merrick—"

"Oh, yes!" smiled handsome Mrs. Vanderloo, her hair gleaming in the lamplight. "You are, of course, welcome, although one must hope—it is not about those girls who are missing? Or have they been found?"

"No, Mrs. Vanderloo, nothing has been heard of them—"

"But that is extraordinary!"

"And it is about them that I have called," Miss Merrick continued. "Mrs. Vanderloo, we have just made a rather significant discovery."

"Indeed?"

"Not far from here, on the moorland road, there are signs that the two girls were stopped on their bicycles and made to get into a car. That car went on a little way, turned round, and came back on to the main road. I must be quite frank. The wheel marks correspond with the tread of the tyres fitted to your car."

The three chums, watching for signs of alarm at least, were amazed at the unruffled composure of all three Vanderloos. Not one of them, to so speak, turned a hair.

"I am sure the headmistress would approve my coming here to see you," Miss Merrick went on. "What explanation can you offer?"

"But we have already been asked if we know anything about those missing girls, and we have said we don't!"

Mrs. Vanderloo was speaking with restrained indignation. Osbert, lighting a cigarette, flourished out the match, and then smoked calmly, watching his aunt. Elsa also seemed to think that it was for Mrs. Vanderloo to do any talking.

Miss Merrick remarked quietly:

"You gave that assurance yesterday—before these discoveries had been made."

"Oh—discoveries!" shrugged Mrs. Vanderloo. "But what discoveries are they? Our tyres correspond with the marks left on that road. But how many other cars are fitted with that make of tyre?"

"Granted," the Form-mistress nodded. "Only, it is known that Fay and Edna Denver were showing great interest in your life at this bungalow, even if you were not interested in them. This girl"—she indicated Betty—"came to the conclusion days ago—"

"Ah, the same girl, I think, who was found by me, trespassing in the bungalow grounds?" Mrs. Vanderloo cut in, with a displeased frown for Betty. "So you also, my girl, must have been feeling—inquisitive—"

"I didn't know anything about you at that time," Betty protested. "I was only there in the grounds because I had seen Fay and Edna prowling round the dwelling. Another thing Mrs. Vanderloo, you can't deny that you became friendly with those two girls. You took them to tea at the hotel."

"Oh, is that to be brought up against me?" the fair-haired woman retorted disdainfully. "It



Betty and Co tried to calm their rioting emotions as the door opened at last. They were face to face with someone they suspected of being a kidnapper—someone they had got to outwit during the next few minutes!

doesn't occur to you that it was those two girls who forced themselves upon me, not I upon them? I am very sorry now that I did not see through their artfulness. But I was not to know, at that time, that they were troubled with this—inquisitiveness."

"Surely, though, now that you do know it," Miss Merrick exclaimed, "you can suggest a reason for their being inquisitive?"

Mrs. Vanderloo shrugged again.

"No. Except, I think, that they were two girls who liked to find acquaintances—entertainment—outside the school."

Osbert Vanderloo shook the ash from his cigarette and returned it to his lips. Elsa moved to the fireplace and threw on another log. Brother and sister, it seemed to the Morecove girls, were implying: How much more of this?

"Anything, else?" Mrs. Vanderloo asked the Form-mistress.

"Not at the moment," was the quiet answer. "But you must expect me to revive the matter with my headmistress as soon as I—"

"Very well then; do that! She can ring me up again; she can send the police to interview us once more," Mrs. Vanderloo shrugged; "we have nothing to fear, for we have done nothing. Osbert, kindly show Miss Merrick and these girls to the door. Good-night!"

The Form-mistress bowed, then signed to the Study 12 three to withdraw with her. Osbert, casting the unfinished cigarette into the fire, was

scrupulously polite in his escorting them to the outer door.

"Good-night to you all," he said smoothly. "I hope you will not consider my aunt was rude to you. But it does seem—a little unfair, perhaps?"

And, giving them no time to make answer, he bowed them away, afterwards quietly closing the porch door.

Returning to the sitting-room, he at once held up a warning finger to his aunt and his sister. They were not to speak.

"Wait," he whispered. "I shall go out, in a few moments—round to the laboratory. It is possible they may not have gone away, but will be spying around—trying to listen."

He went to the window and made sure that the drawn curtains offered no chance of peeping-in. Mrs. Vanderloo took up a newspaper and sat down to read it. Elsa helped herself to a cigarette, and then found herself a book. After a minute, Osbert went out.

He was soon back, his thin, clever face showing a cold smile.

"No, they have gone," he softly announced. "Well, you were right, aunt; they can send the police here, if they like. We have nothing to fear."

He looked at a clock. His doing that caused Mrs. Vanderloo and Elsa to do the same.

"At what time will the charge go off, on Gull Island?" Osbert was asked by his aunt. "Seven o'clock, did you tell us?"

"Yes."
"An hour from now—just about," Elsa commented. Then she gave a long, loud sigh. "It is a pity, but—"

"It has to be," Mrs. Vanderloo said in a most cold-blooded tone. "You could not find the papers—where the two girls hid them on the moor. You never would find them in such a place as that, with only their description to go by. And we could not bring the girls away from the island, to take you to the spot."

"That would have been far too risky," Osbert said, lighting another cigarette. "No, as Elsa says, it is a pity; but—they should not have been inquisitive."

"They've only themselves to blame," was Mrs. Vanderloo's shrugged remark.

"Very well, then, since it had to be," Elsa said tensely. "Only, if some trace of them should be found, some day—"

She stopped. Osbert, as he inhaled cigarette smoke, was smiling.

"No trace of them will ever be found," he gave the quiet assurance. "Twenty thousand tons of rock to cover them, when that charge goes off."

"If an explosion should be suspected, Osbert!" his sister whispered. "Instead of its being regarded as—a mere fall of cliff on the island."

"Even then—nothing to fear," he answered. "Even a suspected explosion would never be associated with the disappearance of those two girls. And who is going to trouble to shift twenty thousand tons of rock out there on a useless little island where not a soul lives?"

Mrs. Vanderloo, with the newspaper lying in her lap, nodded. Elsa had nothing more to say. They were all three silent when the clock began to tinkle the hour.

Ting, ting! it went on, until six strokes had been given.

"An hour from now," Mrs. Vanderloo murmured. "Elsa, find me those cards. I feel like a game of patience—"

Against Time

THE night breeze from off the sea was freshening.

It came at the three schoolgirls and Miss Merrick gustily, as they made their way down the steep path from the cliff-top to the beach.

Their clothing flapped, and now and again wind-blown streaks of hair had to be swept from their eyes, whilst the descent of the winding, irregular path was being made as quickly as possible.

"Are you all right, girls?"

"Oh, rather," Miss Merrick was answered in the darkness—as softly as she herself had spoken. "We're used to this scramble."

"It is the last thing I hope you will have to do, out of doors to-night," the Form-mistress again spoke back to the three. "But I do feel that it would have been wrong, not to take a look at the cave which belongs to the Cliff Edge bungalow."

"Miss Merrick," chuckled Polly, "you'll be laughed at by the Form as much as Betty has been—after this! Pam and I as well!"

For, it had been another idea of Betty's, a few minutes since—that they should work their way down to the shore, to take a look at the boat cave.

And now all four of them were done with the steep descent and were making their way over the shingle. There was no rough sea, but waves were sufficiently yeasty, as they tumbled along the shore, to be visible as whitish gleams in the darkness.

Keeping close in against the cliff, the three girls and their Form-mistress soon came to the cave.

They had felt certain that its lattice gates would be closed and padlocked, and the intention had been to shine one of the torches between the strong lattice-work, to see what the ray might reveal. Also, they had meant to call into the cave, just in case Fay and Edna should be there! After all, that was a possibility.

But, to their amazement, the gates were unlocked and open, and as soon as a torch was switched on it revealed the motor-boat in a ready-for-sea position, only just inside.

"The gates open—those two girls can't be here, then!" Polly exclaimed.

"Oh, no!"

Betty laughed.

"Sorry," she pleaded. "Another silly fancy of mine—nothing in it! Miss Merrick, I must be an utter donk."

"Don't say such things, Betty!"

"But the Vanderloos were quite right about the tyre-treads. Thousands of cars are fitted with those tyres. And, really, what else has there been, except the tyre-marks in the road, to bear out my theory!"

"All the same— Well?" broke off Miss Merrick, for Betty had suddenly gasped as if another idea had flashed upon her.

"The boat—this very boat!"

"What about it, Betty?"

"Yesterday, the Vanderloos put a lot of food on board. Tess and I were down here on the shore and saw Mrs. Vanderloo load the stuff into the boat. We wondered where it could be going—why such quantities of provisions were necessary. And now—I know!"

"You do?" her listeners jerked eagerly. "Well, then—why, why?"

"Fay and Edna—they were to be taken away in the boat and kept somewhere," Betty panted on. "The provisions were for them! And as for where they were being taken, to be kept—how about Gull Island?"

"Gull Island?"

They all four faced about, at the cave entrance, peering across the dark sea.

"Gull Island!" Polly echoed. "Betty—you've got it! Gull Island—"

"Only a few miles out," Pam murmured. "Not a soul lives there. At this time of year there are no holiday-makers to land on the island for an hour or two. The Vanderloos could have taken Fay and Edna there—"

"Easily, with this boat," Miss Merrick agreed in great agitation. "But what has been done to the girls on the island? Have they simply been landed there—marooned, left to fend for themselves?"

"Hardly that, surely," Betty said. "Running free, they might be able to signal to passing boats. Far more likely they have been shut up in one of the many caverns on the island. We know what the place is like—"

"In any case, think of them—the state of mind they must be in!" the Form-mistress broke out afresh. "Oh, something ought to be done without a moment's delay. Not the slightest doubt they're there."

"Then—Miss Merrick!" Polly clamoured. "Why can't we get across to the island right away? Here's the boat—"

"Any of us could handle this thing," Pam serenely remarked. "It's only like starting a small car or a motor-bike. Betty, shine the torch again, will you?"

Next moment the three girls were examining the boat's interior by the light of the torch. Their three voices made running comments on all that they were noticing, whilst Miss Merrick stood by, her gaze significantly directed towards the open sea, her mind working furiously.

"There's plenty of petrol in the tank," Betty suddenly remarked. "Between us we could run the boat down the beach and get her afloat—"

"It's nothing like a rough sea," Polly burst in. "Miss Merrick, won't you have a shot at it—oh, do, do!"

"Yes, I feel I must," came the grave response which elated all three girls. "It is all very well to consider merely going away to arrange for others to go out to the island; but the delay!"

"Hours of delay, most likely," Betty nodded. "The police would have to be told, and they would probably have to call up the nearest lifeboat—and that's at Sandton Bay—"

"Come on, then!" headstrong Polly cried, taking the decision for granted. "All hands to the boat."

At first, only she and her two chums started to haul away, getting the small but strongly built

boat to slide down the shingly slope. Half-way to the sea's edge, however, Miss Merrick was adding her strength to the task.

Then, with a final steady rush, they ran the motor-boat into the foamy shallows.

Pam climbed aboard, and in a few moments was half out of sight in the pilot's pit. Knocking about at home at Swanlake had taught her much about motor engines. She had often driven a car round Swanlake's mile-long private drives, for fun.

Now her companions, whilst they waded in the shallows, holding the boat steady, saw Pam getting busy in the engine-pit.

Half a minute later she had the motor running. Polly and Betty scrambled in over the side, and Miss Merrick followed. She and they had had a good deal to do with boating, Morcove School, only a few minutes from the shore as it was, taught all its girls sailing and rowing, during the summer term. Such knowledge was deemed to be as important as swimming and life-saving—in case of emergency.

She heard Betty voice a favourite slogan: "We'll manage!" And she, the Form-mistress, was quite sure they would!

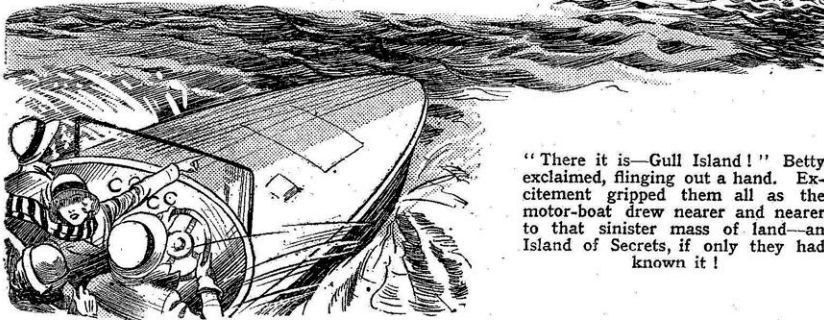
As for Polly, to be taking such an active part at last meant undiluted joy.

"Hard astern, Pam! Back her! She's away!" Polly cheered, as the racing propeller took them riding out through the inrushing waves. "Hurrah!"

Betty and Miss Merrick settled down as quickly as possible. The Form-mistress would have preferred to be in control herself; but the start had been made like this, and it was not a moment for any changing of places.

Nor did Pam fail in her handling of the boat. In deep water, where the waves ran by uncrested, she went into forward speed, and round swept the

With Pam at the wheel the motor-boat hurtled through the waves toward the island—



"There it is—Gull Island!" Betty exclaimed, flinging out a hand. Excitement gripped them all as the motor-boat drew nearer and nearer to that sinister mass of land—an Island of Secrets, if only they had known it!

lively little craft, pointing its sharp nose to the heaving waters.

Betty shone the torch again then, and like a miniature searchlight it played upon the dark sea. Now and then the slap of a wave caused a fountain of spray, which became all glistening drops in the brilliant light.

But the adventurers knew that the batteries of the torches must be spared—saved for later on. Pam soon called out that it would be all right to switch off, and after that there were only the boat's own lights to relieve the darkness. There was very little mist now; but it was a cloudy night—not a star!

Side by side on one of the seats, Betty and Polly watched Pam, as she still had full control, steering by a compass which had its own little electric light.

The boat felt the motion of the waters more and more. Now and then they seemed to go right up and then down again! The wind shrilled in their ears; eyes and lips became bristling. A patch of choppy water caused slap after slap against the boat's bows. And all the while there was the rhythmic purring of the engine, a furious pulsation that seemed to mean ever-increasing speed, so that at last Polly delightedly shouted the guess:

"Twenty miles an hour, Pam?"

"Twenty-three," was the serene correction. Pam could tell exactly, by the speed dial.

"Twenty-three!" Betty and Polly echoed. "Do you hear that, Miss Merrick! We shall be there—any minute now!"

Their peering eyes made out no light from any other vessel. On and on they sped, until suddenly they were aware of the sea falling quieter about them in the night, and the rush of wind against their faces was not so fierce.

Pam slowed the boat. She had needed no warning cry from Miss Merrick or her chums that they must be getting into water sheltered by the island.

And then, of a sudden, they could make out giant cliffs looming before them in the murky darkness. Their race across from the mainland was ended. This was Gull Island, dark and desolate, with the tide lapping the base of the rock walls all round it.

Next moment, with the engine shut off, the boat was drifting in, only slowly and in perfect silence. They could hear the slopping of deep water against rocks.

"Let's try a shout," Polly said. "The island is so small, we might be heard all over it from here."

"Fay! Edna!" they all shouted together. "Hi, Morcove! Fay, are you there? Ed-na! Fay!"

And instantly a faint, wailing cry came back:

"Yes—help! Help, this way—help! We're in a cave—help!"

"Oh, there they are, then, and we have found them!" Miss Merrick panted. "But now—Pam dear—"

"I think perhaps we can steer right to where they are," the girl in the engine-pit called out calmly. "All the caves on the island have the sea running into them."

"A bit to the right, Pam," cried Betty.

"Yes."

The engine came to life again. Slowly, now, the boat was set nosing about, whilst a torch was brought into use. Betty and Polly shouted once more, and another wailing response helped greatly.

One more minute, and Pam was running the boat straight into a deep-water cave, where the

throttling down of the engine caused some plaintive cries to sound eerily.

And there, on a narrow ledge of rock, only a few inches above the sullen water, were Fay and Edna—huddled together.

Betty shone the torch upon them; and their blanched faces—the wildness of their eyes—made both girls such pitiable-looking objects that only to see them was to realise what an ordeal of terror theirs had been.

Tears were coursing down Fay's white cheeks. It was as if the arrival of help, instead of setting her fears at rest, was leaving her unstrung, hysterical.

As for Edna, she screamed to those in the boat, her voice echoing hollowly in the rocky cavern.

"Quick—oh, quick, quick! Get us out of here!"

"All right," Miss Merrick shouted reassuringly; but Edna screamed again:

"There's not a moment to lose! We'll all be killed! Oh, be quick, or you'll be killed along with me and Fay!"

"What!"

"There's going to be an explosion—we know there is," Fay now shrieked. "They have laid the wires, to fire a—charge! Any minute now, the cliffs may come down upon us!"

Although those in the boat glanced at one another in an appalled manner, and although an understanding "Gosh!" came from Polly, they did not lose their heads.

There was another: "All right!" from Miss Merrick, whilst they floated the boat alongside the ledge of rock on which Fay and Edna were huddled.

The Form-mistress, being so much older than the scholars, did not expect any of them to equal her in a display of calmness in such a terrible crisis. But she saw that Betty and Polly and Pam were every bit as calm as she, and she thought to herself:

"If only we survive—how I will let all the school know about this!"

The boat bumped alongside the ledge.

"Now, both of you!" Betty shouted to Fay and Edna. Gently.

The terrified sisters should have accepted steady hands to come on board, but they jumped wildly, and the boat rocked dangerously as it received the weight of both sprawling figures.

Pam, in the pilot's-pit, had meant to re-start the engine the moment Fay and Edna had been taken off the ledge. Now, however, no renewed throb of the motor came; and so Miss Merrick, in case Pam was not sure that they were all ready, called to her calmly:

"Right, Pam dear—back her out."

"Sorry," came the quiet response. "But something has gone wrong—"

And then, except for the moaning and whimpering of the sisters, and the sullen sobbing of deep water, there was silence in the cavern.

At that moment, Osbert Vanderloo came running his hardest across the nightbound cliff-top, on the mainland, to get to Cliff Edge bungalow.

There had been his hasty ascent of the zigzag path before he started to race across the grass, so that when, next minute, he burst in upon his aunt and sister, he had hardly breath enough for speech.

"The boat," he gasped, "it's gone! They—they've gone away in it—only explanation!"

"To Gull Island?" Elsa guessed, wild dismay filling her looks.

He nodded, still heaving for breath.

"Would they have needed it, to go anywhere

along the coast? No—that's where they've gone! And it means—"

"They will have found those two girls in the cave by now," Elsa panted. "They will bring them back—"

"Or does it mean that they also will be there—when the charge goes off?" Mrs. Vanderloo muttered, even now retaining some of her cold-blooded composure.

She glanced at the clock.

"Five to seven!"

Osbert swept a hand across his forehead.

"Anyway, we've got to get out of here. Leave everything—everything, yes! Whether they all return alive, or all get killed—it can make no difference now, to us. We shall be for it. I'll get the car ready. You two—pack what you can!"

And he darted off to where the car was kept.

Seven O'clock!

RURR! Rurr!—and then dead silence. Rurr! "No," Pam's voice sounded hollowly, "she simply won't start up!"

"Oh, well," Betty murmured, whilst she and others in the boat did their best to float her out of the sea cave, using their hands as paddles, "we must just go on trying to—"

Rurr, rurr, rurr—thurr-r-r-r!

"Oh, that's got her! But she's off—you've got her at last, Pam—"

"Yes!" Polly's shout of delight was answered. "Don't speak!"

The propeller, thank heaven, was racing again in the dark waters. Stern first, out glided the boat into the murky night which lay upon the open sea.

Miss Merrick carefully shifted her position, so as to bestow rallying touches upon the shoulders

of Fay and Edna. Those two girls were still whimpering.

Pam spoke again, as calmly as ever.

"We can do without that torch now, Betty."

"Right-ho! I say, you have managed splendidly!"

The boat was on the open sea again, and Pam was turning her round to start the race for the mainland.

Before switching off the torch Betty shone it upon her wrist-watch.

"Just on seven o'clock," she said. "Why, we shall all be indoors by eight—easy!"

"And then!" Polly smiled fiercely. "Perhaps the Form will wish to do some more baiting of you, Betty?"

The motor throbbed a little louder. Pam had gone into full speed ahead.

And—not a moment too soon!

Only another hundred yards had the boat sped, away from those giant cliffs looming blackly in the darkness, when a sudden roar, as if due to volcanic action on the island, shattered the surrounding silence.

There was no vivid flash—no flare of light, however brief. Nor was that shattering explosion short and sharp.

It grew in violence as it continued—the prolonged hurtling and rattling of thousands of tons of displaced rock down into the dark sea.

The boat's occupants, whilst the deafening noise went on, sat mute and still, struck with a terrible awe by what seemed so like an earthquake on the island.

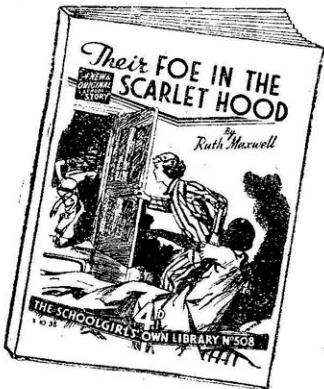
They could feel, more than they could discern, how a vast slice of cliff had been blasted away, just where that cave had been and where no cave would now be discoverable.

(Concluded on the next page.)

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The cave in which, only a few minutes since, Fay and Edna had been awaiting the end of everything! And, if Pam had been a minute longer in being unable to re-start the engine—rescuers and rescued alike must have perished after all!

AN hour later they were back at Morcove School, where the safe return of Fay and Edna would, of itself, have been a big enough sensation—and there was all the rest for staff and scholars to be told!

Then, on through that memorable evening, the intense excitement was fed by scraps of news in regard to what was being done—by the police and also by Miss Somerfield.

It became known that the police had hurried to Cliff Edge bungalow, only to find the place locked up and the Vanderloos—gone!

But the number of their car was known, and it was confidently predicted that sooner or later the fugitives would be under arrest, with the very gravest charges to answer.

Miss Somerfield found a very summary way of dealing with the two miscreants, Fay and Edna.

In their collapsed state, both girls had abjectly confessed to everything done by them of late. This meant that the headmistress became aware of their having stolen some papers from the bungalow and hidden them on the moor.

She demanded that the sisters should conduct her to the spot, so that she herself might take possession of those papers. A refusal, and Fay and Edna would be expelled!

The sisters were in a state of mind rendering them glad enough to accede, and so the "million pound" formula came into the hands of Miss Somerfield—for her to tear it up!

News of all this spread through the school as late as half-past nine that fateful night. And very thankful was Betty when the Form came in for such a fresh sensation.

Now, she mirthfully hoped, there would be a respite from all the penitent demonstrations by

Eva Merrick and some others—a good many others, in fact!

And now, last thing of all, Etta Hargrove was to come tapping at the door of Study 12, obtaining admittance only by giving her name in answer to a yelled:

"What do you want?"

Etta, allowed in, stepped straight to Betty, holding out the captain's sash.

"Here, Betty; you will be wanting this, as soon as Miss Somerfield finds time to send for you."

But Betty shook her head.

"No, thanks, Etta," she said, smiling affectionately. "If Miss Somerfield does send for me—"

"If! Of course she will, Betty, when it is entirely due to you that Fay and Edna are still alive! You solved the mystery—the secret of the Vanderloos' connection with everything!"

"That seems to be the general opinion now!" Polly chuckled.

"Whether it is or isn't," Betty said blithely, "you, Etta, have been managing jolly well as captain during a very trying time. So it is only fair that you should take the rest of your innings, now that the pitch looks like improving! Anyway, I feel like taking a rest from the captaincy. In fact, for many reasons—my mind's made up!"

"Betty, you are to take this sash!"

Betty took it, but only to loop it quickly over Etta's pretty head, letting it fall into place across one shoulder.

And Polly and the others—all those who had never wavered in their loyalty to the ex-captain during her time of trial—they cheered her for doing this, just as loudly as other girls had cheered her, to-night, for such a very different reason.

No longer their captain! That, it seemed, would still have to be said of their adored Betty.

But how much else could be said of her as a girl to whom others certainly owed their very lives, because of *The Secret She Solved!*

[END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.]

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