

"HER FUGITIVE FRIEND OF MYSTERY!" Thrilling New
Serial Inside

The SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN 2¢

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**"She Meant
to Steal
This, Polly!"**

A dramatic incident
from the grand long
Morcove story inside.

There Are FIVE GRAND STORIES In This Issue

UNMASKED *by*



At a Moment's Notice

"SAY, Polly! How would you like a hundred-mile journey?"

"A what, Betty! Hundred miles?"

"Straight away, too!"

"Betty, what on earth is this?"

"As a matter of fact, dear, it has something to do with Anna Goldring—"

"Oh!"

Not surprising that Polly Linton let out such a startled exclamation as her very best chum, Betty Barton, voiced the name of Anna Goldring.

Both girls, along with the rest of Morcove's Study No. 12 "chummery," had become fatefully involved in a certain mystery surrounding the famous film star, whilst staying in London.

It was for the last week of the January holidays that Betty & Co. had managed to be together up in Town.

Polly's parents, favouring the Majestic Hotel, had her and Betty and a

few more in their charge. The rest of the juniors were scattered over the West End, making the Majestic their joyous rendezvous.

"Anna Goldring!" echoed Polly, still staring amazedly at the chum who had just joined her in this bed-room which they shared at the Majestic. "Has she been saying anything, then, that explains the mystery?"

"Nothing! As to that, Polly, we are simply where we left off last night. It's still a puzzler—to know why Anna is having to keep right out of her father's life, although we know how fond of each other they are. Only——"

"Only what, Betty?"

"You remember her last words to us, overnight, dear, in her suite just along this corridor? She said that to-morrow—that's to-day!—she might have something to ask of us. She has asked—a minute since—if you and I would like to go away with her for two or three days."

"But where?"

"It's a place called Cawdry Castle. They're to shoot some of the scenes there for that film they are making. Her film people have got the

**Enthralling LONG COMPLETE Story of
Betty Barton & Co. of Morcove School—**

MORCOVE!



use of the castle—a wonderful old ruin, it is, she tells me—”

“And she wants you and me to go with her! What about the others, Betty? They won't be coming?”

“I'm afraid not, dear, and Anna says she won't take it ill if we prefer, after all, to remain in Town with our chums. She was very sweet about it. She hasn't forgotten that this is our last week of the hols. By the way, she's sounded your father and mother about it, and they're perfectly willing to let us go with her.”

“I'm for going!” it was like impulsive Polly to decide promptly. “I wish the others could come with us. I shall hate leaving them. But, somehow, Betty, when it is anything to do with Anna Goldring—”

“That's how I feel, dear! She has not only made us very fond of her; she has got us so interested in this mystery of—of what shall I call it? Her private life!”

“I can be ready in five minutes, if it comes to that,” Polly announced excitedly.

“Then I'll run and tell her,” Betty laughed. “And be back in a jiffy to get my few things together!”

Betty ran from the hotel bed-room and nipped to a nearby door in the same corridor.

An eager tap-tap, a cordial “Come in!”—and she was with Anna Goldring in the sitting-room of a sumptuous private suite.

“Polly says ‘Yes!’ So, Anna, it's all O.K.—keen as anything, we are—”

“It's awfully nice of you both!”

“Nicer of you to have asked us, Anna! We feel, you see, it's now or never about—about being with you,” Betty candidly blurted. “Once we're back at Morcove, we shan't see anything more of you. We've been so—so interested in you, Anna. Oh, but that isn't quite the right word, either!” Betty grimaced. “‘Interested’ sounds like being inquisitive, and we haven't wanted to be that!”

“My dear girl, as if I don't know quite well just what your feelings have been,” was Anna Goldring's half-smothered murmur. “I shall never forget the efforts you have made in the last few days to bring my father and me together again.”

“And all for nothing,” Betty sadly rejoined. “You will get fed-up with me, Anna; but—do

By Marjorie Stanton

ILLUSTRATED BY L. SHIELDS

you know it kept me awake for a couple of hours last night, thinking how Polly and I managed at last to get your father to come to this very hotel to meet you again after two years. And you would not go down to him. You made us go down to him, instead, and—and send him away!”

“For a reason, Betty dear. All I can say; there is a reason. And now—”

Anna Goldring glanced at her platinum wrist-watch.

“My car is to be ready outside at ten, Betty, and it's a quarter-to now!”

Betty took the hint and went.

“It's a puzzler, Polly!” said Betty, when she rejoined Polly in their bed-room. “Nothing to be got out of her that will explain it all—not a word! And, worse luck, we needn't think we are going to find out things by going with her! That secret of hers is locked away—in her heart.”

At that moment Naomer rushed into the room. “Bekas—sweendle! What is zis about you and Betty going away with ze film star?” Mrs.

Linton has just been eggplanting to some of us downstairs—”

“About our contract?” Polly suggested sweetly.

“Contract? What ze diggings do you mean by—”

“Oh, didn't mother tell you that?” the madeap purred on. “Betty and I—

—in which they finally come to grips with
PLOTTERS IN FILMLAND!

a contract with the film people! A thousand a year each, and all found!"

"Ah, bah—pulling my leg!"

"We have quite enough of you, kid, in term-time," the madcap retorted. "Hallo, mumsie! You'll be able to let me have some money, won't you?"

Mrs. Linton, who had now appeared upon the scene, only laughed at having this question sprung upon her so anxiously. If anybody knew Polly's fondness for playful make-believe, her own mother did.

"So you two girls have made up your minds you'd like to go? I've just come up to have a last little talk with you and to make sure that you have everything you want."

There was in this latter remark a cause for Naomer's looking more aggrieved than ever. She made a face at Polly and whisked out of the room to rejoin the rest of the Co. downstairs. Thus Paula Creel and others became an audience for further comments on the great "sweundle."

Five minutes later, Betty and Polly came down, dressed for the journey, whilst their bits of luggage were taken straight out to the waiting car. The usual early morning quietude of the hotel lounge was now marred by that babel which always attended any Morcove good-bye.

Nor did the presence of Grangemoor School, in the persons of Polly's brother Jack and Tom Trevor and Tubby Bloor, render the scene less exciting.

Jolly one another up to the last moment, the entire crowd of girls and boys finally drifted on to the pavement.

Anna Goldring had yet to come out to the waiting car; but Betty and Polly took their seats, the madcap spreading herself most luxuriously with an idea of tantalising Naomer and others.

Then Jack felt that he must make a farewell offering to his sister. So he briskly took from Naomer a carton of fancy chocolates which Tubby had just bestowed upon the dusky scholar; and Jack, with great politeness, handed this in to Polly.

Some shrieks of merriment caused all the more passers-by to stop and look, so there was quite a large crowd when, next minute, Anna Goldring came running down the hotel steps and across the pavement.

With an elaborate bow, Jack swung open the car door for Anna.

Polly pushed Jack away, so as to be able to close the car door with a boisterous slam!

She and Betty could tell how Anna, at the wheel, was enjoying all the comedy which had been introduced into the departure. They saw her include all those upon the pavement in a final fond smile and give a little wave of a gloved hand.

"Hooray!" the two in the car heard their chums cheering, and Jack's voice starting to sing: "Should auld acquaintance—"

"Bye for now!" Polly called out through the lowered window as the car glided away. "Bye, all! Bye, mumsie darling!"

Betty expected Polly to draw in her head and flop back smilingly. But, instead, it was as if Morcove's madcap had suddenly suffered an annoyance—so fiercely did she look when she did sink back.

"Why, what's up, then?" asked Betty, staring.

"There on the pavement—I got just a glimpse of that hateful face of hers!" Polly whispered, adding fiercely: "Becky Jervoise! Look, you can see her now!"

Does It Mean Danger?

"WHAT that girl!"

Betty was instantly sharing Polly's annoyance to the full.

"Then she must have turned up, Polly, meaning to make a scene—have some row with Anna?"

"And too late—thank goodness, too late by just a few seconds! How lovely!" Polly changed back from anger to merriment. "We were off, just in the nick!"

"That really is splendid," Betty agreed heartily. "Did Anna see her stepister, do you think?"

"Very likely not, Betty. I'm pretty sure Becky Jervoise only appeared just as Anna was driving away. But Becky saw whose car it was, right enough; I noticed her gaze on Anna at the wheel."

Betty received this with an understanding nod and sat watching the film star, who was driving every bit as calmly as the London traffic required her to do. This in itself seemed a reassuring sign. Anna Goldring could hardly have glimpsed her enemy-stepister, just then, and still have remained composed.

After a few moments, Betty and Polly resumed their whispering. There was no glass partition between themselves and Anna; but it was quite safe for them to converse, provided they subdued their voices.

"Not mention it, by-and-by, Polly?"

"Rather not, Betty! There's a lot we don't understand, but we do know that it sort of opens a wound—for Anna to be even reminded of her stepister."

"Well! Anna's leaving to go down in the country like this, with us, means that she is safe for the next day or two from more upsets."

"At a time, too, when she needs to be spared upsets. I mean," Polly muttered, "when she has to give all her mind to the film making. But it's all right! We just got away in time!"

Anna's handling of the car during the journey out of London kept them watching her far more than the crowded streets along which they ran.

There she sat in front of them at the wheel, the lovely, gifted girl over whom the film world had gone crazy.

Betty and Polly thought of the millions of people there must be who had seen and admired Anna on the films, and yet of all those millions none knew the secret, the tragedy of her young life.

Was that secret sorrow of hers never to be ended? If so, what an empty thing to her all the fame must be that she had won!

Presently Betty found that she could see the reflection of Anna's adorable face in the little traffic-mirror.

From the sadness on it, Betty guessed that she was thinking of her father—that London doctor who was himself so admired and revered by the poor amongst whom he laboured! A father to look up to and love, as Anna, Morcove knew, did look up to him and love him—passionately. And yet she was estranged from him!

"Betty—"

"Yes, dear?"

Polly's mind also had been running upon the strange affair. Now she whispered, with that grim look which was hers whenever she felt desperate:

"I almost wish that Becky girl would turn up at Cawdry—so long as you and I could deal with her! It shall have played some hateful part or other in her!—"

"Oh, must have done!" Betty nodded. "The

mere fact that she so slanged Anna to us—told such lies about her! I can imagine, from the very hour Becky came into the doctor's home, as his stepdaughter, that it was misery for Anna."

Suburban wildernesses of brick-and-mortar were left behind at last, and the car sped along an arterial road. Soon they were off the main road, and there were noble hills to right and left, and only an occasional hamlet to relieve the loneliness.

Then, more than half-way to their journey's end, Anna pulled up for lunch at a most picturesque hotel in the heart of a small market town.

The age-old, gabled place was lifeless to-day, but not unready to offer them an old-fashioned hospitality. A jolly fire of logs blazed upon the wide hearth, in the low-ceilinged dining-room to which they resorted, after a wash and tidy-up.

Betty and Polly, coming into the room together; found Anna standing in front of the fire. She had been gazing down at the flames that leapt chimneywards—perhaps seeing pictures in the fire—but she turned to both girls instantly, smiling fondly.

"So nice to have you with me," she exclaimed gently. "I dare say you have wondered why I asked it of you. But I felt that you were just the ones to have with me. In the last day or two—there has been a lot to make me feel very fondly of you."

A buxom servant, wearing a snow-white apron, came in to place things upon the table, but she would have to go to and fro once again before the travellers need sit down. Anna strayed to the window that looked on to the empty market square and stood gazing out.

"It isn't that I don't like the country," she murmured on, "although I do prefer London. All that I love most is bound up with London! But I felt that—just at present—it would be so awfully lonely, away from Town."

"All the other film people will be at Cawdry?" Betty hinted comfortingly.

"Oh, those! Not the same, my dears. No." And there was that tender look again for both girls, as Anna sauntered back to them. "You see, you know things they don't—"

The maid came in again. "But we can sit down now." She turned the talk, going to her own chair at the table. "This, girls, is not the Majestic!"

"Goodness!" Polly exclaimed at sight of so many covered dishes and tureens. "They must have expected Naomer here—and Tubby!"

"You had better seize the chance," Anna said half-seriously. "I've no intention of staying at an hotel at Cawdry, if there is anywhere else for us—a ploughman's cottage, or anything! The Elmsham crowd will be swarming at the hotel."

As much to Betty and Polly's delight as Anna's, at the end of their long run from Town, they found a delightful old farmhouse at which to put up.

It was the Castle Farm, run by an elderly couple, whose grown-up children were all getting their livings away from home.

Lodging here with the two Morcovians, Anna would be very close to her work; it was not much more than a stone's throw from the farmhouse to the crumbling, ivied ruins of the ancient castle.

There was a village, but this was a mile away across the fields. An up-to-date hostelry, doing a roaring business with visitors in the holiday season, was likely to suit the "Elmsham crowd" splendidly.

But all the cameramen and other technicians had yet to arrive, with their paraphernalia.

By the last of the wintry daylight, Betty and Polly went out to get a first look at the picturesque ruins.

Anna had more unpacking to do than had the girls, and so they did not expect her to rejoin them out-of-doors. Besides, they could imagine that she would feel tired after the long drive from London.

After the roar of London, the intense stillness of the frosty twilight, in such a lonesome, romantic spot, was almost eerie.

Betty and Polly somehow felt little inclined for talk. Vaguely they were oppressed. This rural quietude was inducing their minds to run only



"The 'phone message were for one o' they youngsters, the one as is called Polly," the farmer explained. Neither Betty nor Polly dare say what they were thinking, but both were wondering if the message related to Anna's stepister.

upon the mystery of Anna's position, in relationship to her father.

No joyous spirits like Naomer and Bunny were with these two Morcovians, to provide any comic diversion. On the other hand, Betty and Polly could not feel that they were likely to be instrumental in ending the painful estrangement between father and daughter.

A cruel disappointment, that, to both school-girls!

To all their loving goodwill towards Anna herself had been added a tremendous regard for that noble-minded man who, only last night, had spoken of Anna as if she meant everything to him.

The light waned still more, and yet Betty and Polly continued to wander about amongst the ruinous walls and the old stone archways. Some parts of the castle were still standing to a great height, with here and there a tall tower, all broken at the top.

"No mistake, Betty, the film people will get some wonderful scenes out of all this!"

"Some thrilling effects, too—shouldn't wonder," Betty nodded, standing with her chum to gaze around. "Perhaps there is to be a shot, with Anna in great danger—high up somewhere, like that tower over there. What a tower that is, Polly!"

Betty did not voice her estimate of the height, although she had been forming one just then.

She suddenly gazed more intently than ever at the tower.

Just In Time!

"**Q**UEER!" Betty muttered at last. "Only my fancy, after all, most likely—the light is very tricky now. But I thought I saw someone—after an instant, a figure moving about up there!"

"At the top of that tower, Betty? Surely not!" was Polly's incredulous cry. "At a time like this! It's not a summer evening, with visitors swarming the place."

"If there's anyone else taking a look round, I should have thought we'd have known," Betty concluded. "There hasn't been a sound."

"But here's Anna," Polly delightedly remarked. "She has come to find us."

The unmistakable figure of the film actress—small and graceful and lithe, was suddenly gladdening their eyes by giving a touch of life to so desolate a scene.

Anna had come picking her way amongst grass-grown mounds of fallen masonry, first showing herself to the chums as she emerged from a dim archway.

Even as they waved to her so eagerly, Betty and Polly were thinking what a "shot" this would have made for any film; the background so picturesque and Anna herself so bewitching.

And then suddenly this pleasing sensation changed, for both girls, to one of dreadful alarm. They yelled out together to warn her:

"Anna! Anna—look out—run, Anna—run!"

For, to their horror, they could see a portion of the jagged masonry—a topmost bit, sharply defined against the evening sky—tottering as if it must come crashing down.

Fall it did in that same instant—outwards, and right above the spot which Anna was treading.

Before the horrified girls had time to shout again, there was a harsh rumble.

Then came the terrific r-r-rump! of several tons of stone and brickwork, as it struck the ground after hurtling down.

Clouds of dust and powdered mortar arose, and for one more moment of utter horror, Betty and Polly could not make out whether Anna were safe or no.

Then the blur cleared away, and she was dimly in view again—standing quite still after what must have been a darting aside just in time to escape death itself.

Betty and Polly rushed to her. They thought her face looked as white as a ghost's; but their own faces were the same.

"Are you quite all right, Anna?"

"Quite! Thanks to you two girls," she added in a panting way. "Your shout of warning came just a second before I knew that—that something was happening up there."

She looked up to the top of one of the castle's derelict towers. It was one that had lost, in the last minute or so, a few more feet in height. Now there was one more mound of fallen stonework and flint-and-brick for the grass to grow over in time down here.

"Whew!" Polly fumed. "You might have been killed!"

"It's best not to think about it any more, girls."

"I say, though!" Betty jerked. "I hope that isn't the state of the ruins elsewhere, Anna! I mean—if you've got to do any scrambling about amongst them to-morrow for the shots!"

"Oh, it will all be seen to," she smiled, already recovering her shaken nerves. "I don't know why that load of stuff came down like that—unless winter frosts have been breaking it up. There's no wind to-night."

Anna was walking on again, expecting the two girls to put themselves in step with her. But Polly remained as if transfixed by a sudden, appalling thought. She suddenly beckoned Betty closer, behind Anna's back.

"That was the very tower, wasn't it, Betty?" her chum whispered agitatedly. "The one where you thought you saw—"

"Sh!" Betty gestured, whilst her eyes said: "Yes! But not a word about that now, dear!"

Anna turned round.

"We had better get back to the farmhouse, girls. It's really much too late now—quite too dark for seeing anything more. Funny," she laughed a little emotionally, "I only came out, after all, to keep an eye upon you. And it led to your saving me like that!"

In a tense silence they made their way back to the farmhouse without further talk about the hair-breadth escape.

The white-whiskered farmer was still clumping about his yard, giving a last look to livestock by the light of a stable-lantern. But, to their surprise, they found him coming to speak to them as they went by on the flinty drive.

"Begging your pardon, young ladies," he said in his slow, rumbling way, "but they're sent across from the post office in the village about a telephone message."

"Oh!" Anna exclaimed, her brows going up.

"For me?"

"Why, no, miss; the 'phone message is for one o' these youngsters, I were told; the one as is called Polly!"

"Urgent!"

"**F**OR me?"

"Ay, miss, if you be Polly Linton. 'Twere your brother, the message said, and would you ring 'un up at the hotel in Lunnon. Soon as you can, I fancy."

"Now, what can that mean?" wondered Anna, meeting in turn the astonished eyes of Betty and Polly. "Your brother, Polly! Not your mother, but Jack!"

"Oh, if it's from Jack, then it's nothing for you to fidget about!" Polly promptly laughed. Like Betty, she was thinking: "Something about Anna, but it may be as well for her not to know!"

"Polly and I can go along to the village straight away," Betty suggested, keeping anxiety out of her voice. "But you don't need to come, Anna? We're sure you're tired."

"Very well, girls. You'll be together."

No sooner had the farmhouse door closed, after letting in Anna, than Betty and Polly broke into a run for the village.

It was a haste due to that anxiety which had been kept out of their looks and voices, whilst Anna was present.

Jack was fond of his joke, and he had been known to ring up his madcap sister at school simply for fun's sake. But, somehow, both girls felt sure that he had resorted to the telephone, this time, as a desperate means of getting into touch with them on a matter of great importance.

Tearing along the winding lane, they soon had the village lights shining before them in the darkness. A final sprint, and they were in the village street, discerning one of the familiar signs: "You may telephone from here," projecting from the wall of a cottage.

They reached this, the village post office, to see a bespectacled dame on the inner side of a diamond-paned window, in which an oil-lamp hung. She was making up the postbag that would soon be leaving, stamping letters on a counter which held bottles of sweets.

Betty and Polly let themselves into the cottage by lifting a latch, and the worthy woman smiled across the counter to them.

"Ah, you've come about that 'phone-call—to be sure! I guessed the young gen'l'man as rang up must mean one of you that's come to stay at the farm. Farmer Appleson's wife had only just looked across with some letters to go off, and she'd told me about you—luckily."

"You'll try and get the Majestic Hotel at once?" Polly puffed. "I can tell you the number—"

"Oh, thank 'ee, my dear, but the young gen'l'man that spoke from Lunnon—he told me the number that would find him. Just half a minute!"

Betty could feel more amused than anything else; but to impatient Polly it was maddening delay—to see the postmistress first put all her letters together, and then push the scales straight and close a till before turning to the instrument.

But, as soon as the number had been put through, the connection was made with wonderful quickness for a trunk-call.

Polly took over at the receiver, standing amongst biscuit tins and shelves holding packet-tea and muslined cheese.

There was a minute's delay, whilst Jack, at the Majestic, was being fetched to the 'phone—probably by a page-boy.

Then Betty, standing by in this poky village shop, heard only Polly's side of the telephone talk:

"That you, Jack? Polly speaking! Yes, go ahead. What!"

So they had inferred aright. It was something important—quite startling to Polly, now that she was being told.

"I—see! Oh, right-ho, and thanks ever so!

Just as well—yes, rather! No, nothing. That's just what we think!" And after a pause: "Well, 'bye for now, Jack! 'Bye!"

Polly rang off. Her face, as she turned round to look at her waiting chum, was charged with excitement.

If Betty had not remembered that there was the trunk-call to pay for, they might both have been, next moment, outside the village post office. Polly, in her present state of mind, would never have thought to ask: "How much, please?"

"It's about Becky Jervoise," was tensely imparted to Betty, as soon as they were out in the neighbourhood village street once more. "Jack had an idea that Becky might butt in—down here."

"He did?"

"He felt he ought to warn us. After we'd left in the car, this morning, he and the others saw Becky go into the hotel to inquire for Anna. Then they saw her go to one of the hotel telephone-boxes. Jack wondered if she were ringing up the Elmsham studios to see if they could tell her more about Anna's movements than the hotel people had been able to do."

"And very likely they could!"

"Yes. That, at any rate, is what Jack fancied. He found, by ringing up Elmsham himself, that she had made the inquiry. He was going to write to me by to-night's post. Then he decided to 'phone. The sooner we were warned the better."

Betty received this in silence. She walked a few yards with Polly, thinking hard, then checked, peering along the village street. On one side, the huddle of low-roofed cottages gave place to the big, gabled inn, with its hanging sign: The Cawdry Arms Hotel.

"But, no," Betty suddenly decided aloud, "she wouldn't be there. It isn't to be expected that she would take a room where the film people would be certain to put up."

"My goodness," Polly suddenly gasped, "I hope she hasn't turned up at the farm and is already making trouble for Anna! But if Becky has come down to-day—if she set off after us, by train to the nearest station, as soon as she found out—she would only have to inquire in the village."

"The whole place knows we're here, of course," Betty nodded, walking on again. "But now I wonder, if Becky has come down, has she come—in secret? I wonder—Oh, Polly, I know it's a terrible thing to be imagining! But—Anna's narrow escape, just now, at the ruins—"

Polly, stopping dead, looked at her chum, aghast.

"You mean, Betty—when you fancied you saw a figure, high up in the ruins—"

"Just where all that stuff broke away, only a few seconds later! You do see what I mean, Polly? If it was Becky Jervoise—up there, creeping about?"

"Oh, but that's too awful! At that rate, Betty, it is more than a possible upset to Anna, if her stepsister is here! It means—deadly danger!"

"You know how I hate jumping to conclusions. But I fancied I saw a figure up there, before we heard this about Becky's perhaps following from London. Here, let's hurry, anyhow, to see if she has turned up at the farmhouse."

They started to run back along the lane even faster than they had come down it only a few minutes since. But, a couple of hundred yards short of the farmhouse, Betty was seized with an idea that made her sign to Polly to go on tiptoe with her, cautiously slow.

"I'm thinking," Betty whispered, "we'll listen

outside instead of going straight in. If Becky is there with Anna, we shall soon know. If she isn't—"

"I get you," Polly nodded eagerly. "Creep away, and—and do a scout round the ruins? In case! For we do know she has had time to get down here. We had tea before we went to the ruins."

There was not the complete silence of after-dark in the country, round about the farmhouse. From stock-sheds opening on to the strawy yard came the chance rattle of a cow-chain or so, and the steady munching sounds of cattle in their stalls.

But, as if there really were a stillness which must not be marred by the faintest of footfalls, the two girls stole up to a parlour window and listened.

Not a voice was to be heard; but suddenly the shadow of Anna Goldring came upon the drawn curtains as she moved between the window and a lamp standing upon the table.

Then some piano-music floated out to the listening pair. They could tell that Anna had sat down to the old-fashioned piano. There was her delicate touch upon the yellowed keys for a minute; then she broke off. The instrument was too out-of-tune for her to be able to go on.

"She's all by herself, right enough," Betty whispered. "So now to make sure that Becky Jervoise isn't hanging about in secret."

"It's up to us," Polly breathed. "The more I think about what happened at the ruins—"

"Yes!"

And they tiptoed away.

Morcove on the Watch!

WOULD it be possible for anyone to shelter for the night amongst the ruins? At this bitter season—the very depth of winter—surely it would be taking a chance for anyone to do so!

One thing seemed certain, however. If that glimpsed figure of an hour ago, on the tower-top, really had been Becky's, then secrecy was imperative for what she had come down to Cawdry to do.

It might easily be that she not only did not want Anna to know of her arrival, but needed to keep the village in ignorance. In that case she, Becky, could seek no bed for the night in the village.

Then a shrewd idea flashed upon Betty's mind, and she whispered Polly, whilst they were making their way so stealthily out to the ruins:

"We mustn't forget the barns and other out-buildings at the farm. A corner somewhere out of the draught, Polly, and plenty of straw—snug enough!"

"Goodness, but how can we poke about in every likely place at the farm!"

"We just can't, and that's all there is to it. What we can do, though—be on the look-out at daybreak in the morning."

Meantime, they came again to the ruins, where they held themselves very still, so that straining ears might pick up the very faintest sound.

The new moon had already gone down. It was now dangerously dark amongst the walls and broken arches. But if Betty and Polly only stood still to listen, instead of creeping this way and that, it was not from fear of coming to harm.

This, they were realising, might be the very time for Becky Jervoise to come sneaking away from some lurking-place to seek shelter for the night.

So, instead of prowling about and perhaps making a self-revealing sound by a stumbling step, far better to keep quite still.

They wanted no encounter with her, but hoped to keep watch upon her, if she did prove to be here.

But, although they waited in the darkness for a full half-hour, the strange vigil went unrewarded. Not once had there been even the faintest sound to make them think: "There she is!"

Unless Anna was to wonder what had become of them, they needed to return now. Their caution was as great as ever, and constantly they paused on their way back to the farmhouse to peer about and listen.

Still, neither sight nor sound to justify the grave suspicion—that Becky might be lurking around this very night, meaning harm to her step-sister! And so, very naturally, the two girls began to feel that their suspicions had gone too far.

Nothing in their theory, after all, perhaps! Becky, finding out that Anna had left Town, had simply postponed some desired interview.

"Well, what was it all about?" Anna rather imperiously asked Betty and Polly, as they rejoined her in the cosy parlour. "No bad news, I hope?"

"Oh, you know what Jack is!" Polly laughed; and as a blind she quoted what had been only a trifling part of the telephone talk: "He wanted to know if we got here O.K., and what the place is like."

"And you told him—deadly dull?" Anna smiled. "Girls, this is going to seem a long, long evening! That piano's no good. To think that you might be up there in London, with all the others, going to some show!"

"If we can make somebody for you to talk to," Betty blithely responded, "Polly and I won't complain."

Anna's grateful look conveyed the sense of comfort she derived from their society. Then suddenly her spirits seemed to go "phut." She spoke querulously, giving a little shiver.

"Oh, I don't know what's the matter with me, this evening, girls; but something seems to be hanging over me. I'm so sorry to be such poor company. Best thing, I suppose—go to bed early."

"Go up now?" Polly suggested. "Don't think of us, Anna."

It was Polly's sudden hope that, if Anna did go up to her room at once, there might be a chance to do another scout round, unbeknown to her.

But Anna, although she frequently patted back a yawn, was with the two schoolgirls right on until ten o'clock. By that time, the Applesons were going to bed, and Betty and Polly could not stay about downstairs when everyone else had gone up.

They climbed to the bed-room floor with Anna, said "Good-night" to her on the draughty landing, and passed to their own, low-ceilinged, candle-lit bed-room.

Their first act was to blow out the candle. Then they went to the window and peered eagerly into the outer darkness.

The lattice-window at which Betty and Polly were watching looked down on to the stable-yard. By day, something of the ruins also could be seen from here, over the tops of the outbuildings; but on this moonless night there was utter blackness in that direction.

It did not matter greatly to the two girls that

they could only usefully watch the scene below. Had someone been waiting until all lights were out at the farmhouse before creeping to find shelter in some straw-filled shed? That was what Betty and Polly were thinking now.

But this last anxious vigil was as fruitless as the first had been. Sounds came up to them which proved to be only the stamping of some plough-horse or other in his stall.

The fireless room was bitterly cold, and warm dressing-gowns could not save Betty and Polly from a feeling of thankfulness when, presently, they snuggled under blankets, convinced that they had stayed at the window long enough.

Twice, when another moment would have had both girls asleep at last, they were out of bed and darting across to the window, because of some sound that might—yes, it might have been due to a stranger prowling around. But in both instances it proved to be a false alarm.

Her chum's measured breathing was itself a

herself upon an elbow. "Don't make a sound, but get dressed with me. We can't have a candle."

"Whew, like that, is it?" breathed Polly, her wits about her instantly. "And I was fast asleep! The time, Betty—any idea?"

"Just gone five. I heard the village clock. I say," Betty whispered on, "we must put on enough for out-of-doors. She's here—"

"Becky is?"

"She's actually been inside this house! But now she's gone. Only a few seconds ago—I saw her, over the banisters, letting herself out."

"But we'll never do it," Polly fumed, rushing herself into day-things. "Once outside the house, Betty, she'll run for all she's worth!"

"Or will she hang about in one of the farm buildings to wait until it's nearer daylight? Whatever she's been up to, Polly, she must be afraid of blundering into anyone at five in the morning!"



Betty and Polly entered the garage so quickly that Becky Jervoise had no warning of their presence. She whirled round from the car, a guilty look on her face. Had she been tampering with the engine, they wondered?

lullaby for Betty. She slept—but she awoke with a start, how long afterwards she could not tell.

The wintry night was at its darkest, but she realised that it might be only another half-hour to the peep of day.

By striking a match she could get the time from her wrist-watch; but she preferred not to get a light until she had become reassured about one thing.

Such a sudden waking up—had it, perhaps, been caused by a sound which would come again?

Hark! There, at any rate, was a sound now—inside the farmhouse!

The Darkest Hour

"S! Polly—"

"Urr, wha'—"

"Sh! Up, Polly!" whispered Betty, as the chum whom she had so gently roused lifted

"In the house, she was! What on earth for?" "Can't imagine, unless— Oh, Polly, unless she has done some harm to Anna in her sleep! But surely not," Betty quavered on, doing everything as quickly as her chum. "She did come down, though, yesterday, and I'm convinced it was Becky at the ruins!"

"I'm ready, if you are. Come on, then!"

And, carrying their outdoor shoes, the excited girls padded from the bed-room in stocking feet.

The pitch-dark farmhouse was yielding only one sound—that of the farmer's heavy snoring, where he and his good wife were still in heavy sleep.

At the foot of the dark stairs, Betty and Polly put on their shoes, then tiptoed to an outer door which, as a raging draught had told them, was not latched-to.

"She left it like this," was Betty's whispered

comment, as they got to the door, "fearing to work the latch."

"How did she get in, though? They locked up at bed-time."

"Dairy window, perhaps. But that doesn't matter now," Betty was whispering, when she received an excited nudging from her chum.

"Over there—the stable-yard!" Polly breathed in Betty's ear. "A line of light, under that coach-house door."

A glance in that direction, and Betty stared aside at her chum amazedly.

"Anna's car was put there for the night. Good gracious, Polly, have I only mistaken Anna for Becky? Was it Anna I saw when I looked over to the banisters just now? Only Anna—going out to her car?"

"Not it," Polly derided that idea in a deep whisper. "Why on earth should Anna come down to her car at this hour? Anyway, we can soon make sure."

Nor did it take them more than a half-minute to arrive, on tiptoe, at the coach-house doors.

The key was in the lock, or either Betty or Polly would instantly have tried peering through the keyhole. As it was, they promptly decided to go in without warning. The doors were unfastened, as if ready to be swung wide to let the car come out.

Betty it was who pulled on the door that had the key in it. She found it coming open without any creaking of hinges—so quietly that for an instant somebody inside the garage, whom Betty could already see, received no warning.

Then that person, who had the car's bonnet raised, flashed round. And it was—Becky Jervoise!

She had been using a pocket-torch to do some fiddling with a part of the mechanism under the bonnet. Instantly she thumbed off the torch, and Betty and Polly fully expected her to try dashing out, with the darkness to help her in an attempt to elude them.

Then the torch came on again. Its ray roved from one girl to the other as they were boldly darting inside the coach-house. In both minds was the same thought:

"She mustn't escape—mustn't get past us!"

With their backs to the double-doors, which were closed together again, they must have presented such a shoulder-to-shoulder readiness to oppose Becky in any attempt at a getaway, that she quite lost her nerve.

"Keep that light on, Becky Jervoise," Betty sternly requested. "It won't be seen—there's no one else about."

"But we'll raise the house, if you move," Polly grimly threatened. "You'll explain now."

That white face, in the deflected light from the torch, looked so terror-stricken, neither schoolgirl was surprised when a few moments had passed without a word issuing from those parted lips.

"What were you doing to that car?" Betty demanded. "You weren't going to start it up at a time like this?"

"She was tampering with it!" Polly exclaimed furiously. "That's what it means, Betty! Doing something to make it break down on the road—perhaps cause an accident to Anna!"

"That's a lie, anyhow!" Becky Jervoise panted wildly. "How dare you suggest that I—"

"Wait a bit," Betty struck in. "My friend may be excused for thinking such a thing. You were skulking amongst the castle ruins at dusk last evening!"

"I was not! That's another lie! I tell you—"

"Oh, bluster," Betty shrugged, "and there's the truth all the while in your eyes! It was you on top of that tower! It was all through you that those tons of stuff came down—missing Anna by only a few inches!"

"An accident!" Becky moaned abjectly.

"Accident!" echoed Polly witheringly.

"Oh, but it was, I tell you—I swear it!" the young woman whimpered. "I admit, then, I was climbing about up there. I climbed the winding steps, because I—I wanted to see the farmhouse from the top, if I could. But I slipped and fell against the wall, and it gave way. I nearly went with it."

She had to break off, heaving for breath. She was in such a frightened, flustered state, Betty stepped up to her and took the torch from her. The hand that had held it went at once, shakily, up to its owner's forehead.

"As true as I live, I was only there for that reason," she quavered on. "And yet you have been telling Anna that I tried to harm her—that I caused all that brickwork to fall, hoping to kill her!"

"We've told Anna nothing," Betty said curtly. "But she will have to be told—at any rate, about this; your being here—entering the farmhouse and then coming out here to meddle with her car. You're not her well-wisher! We realised that from the first!"

"It could all be explained—"

"It has got to be explained to her—presently—"

"No!" Betty's decisive remark was answered in a distraught way. "Oh, no—no! Now, please, look here, you two girls; let me go away—leave me to do just that—"

"Sorry," they both said flatly. "It can't be done."

"But it will be best for Anna not to know—it will; oh, it will—"

"We don't agree! You're her enemy, and you came down here in secret. Supposing we held our tongues and let you go? It would be keeping Anna ignorant of what she ought to know—that you're no longer content with spiting her. You would even do her harm if you could!"

"I tell you, I don't wish to harm her!"

"Then why all this?" Betty insisted. "Anyway, you must stand away and let me take a look inside the bonnet of this car."

"Right, then—see for yourself!" Becky Jervoise eagerly challenged, retreating a step or two. "See if you can find any signs of tampering!"

She fetched another deep breath, then spoke wildly again, whilst Betty advanced to inspect the car by the light of the torch. Polly stood rather policeman-like, never taking her eyes off the hunted-looking girl.

"Now I'll tell you, just to prove what sillies you've both made of yourselves," Becky resumed. "I was going to borrow the car, that's all—leaving a note for Anna! You can say that was cheek of me, anyhow, but— Here, what are you getting at now!"

"Keep back, or we'll give that shout, after all," Betty said—and again Becky stood daunted.

The breaking off, just then, to give that savage, protesting cry, had been due to Betty's opening one of the car-doors.

"We want more light, so I'm going to switch on inside," Betty calmly remarked, seeking a switch on the dashboard.

The tiny bulb in the roof of the car came on, and then— Betty stared at something lying upon the front seat.

Turning her eyes upon Becky Jervoise, to be ready if that girl should now fly at her, Betty quickly picked up what was on the seat and brought it out of the car.

"Anna's jewel-case. Polly!" Betty opened the case as she spoke, and the jewels flashed in the light.

"What!"

"Yes, she meant to steal it and get away in the car."

"Ah, you beasts!" raged Becky with a lift and fall of clenched hands. "It's no business of yours, anyhow! I tell you, you're all wrong in what you think! I've a right to what's in that case! She owes me money! She—"

"Now, Becky Jervoise, I think you had better say no more," Betty gravely advised. "It's not going to do any good, jumping from lie to lie. You've been to Anna's room whilst she was asleep, and you have robbed her. You were going to get away in the car, which was to be found abandoned, I suppose, miles away from here. If we girls hadn't been on the look-out for you—just you—this theft might never have been traced to you."

"Oh, be quiet!" Becky moaned. "I'm her sister—"

"Stepsister only," Polly corrected. "There's a big difference."

"Anyway, we simply have no right to let you go now," was Betty's firm rejoinder. "Anna herself must deal with you; we can't."

"But you can—oh, you can!" came in a voice more abject than ever. "If I promise—swear to you, never again after this—"

"No!"

"What do you want from me, then, in return for letting me go?" the guilty girl rushed on, looking half-frantic. "Oh, you've got the jewels, so why keep me here, simply to have a scene when Anna comes down! You know where I live; it isn't as if you didn't know—"

"The whole thing has become so serious—"

"Then you mean to ruin me—when a week from now I was to be married to a man—"

"Oh!" Betty jerked. "Would that be the man who dressed up to pose as Dr. Jervoise the other day?"

"A joke—that was all!" Becky blustered. "It doesn't mean that my fiancé is a bad character. Whatever he is, he is the man I'm fond of. And now you're going to make a public affair of all this, and he will be done with me!"

"You can rely on Anna not to—"

"But I don't want to meet Anna!" And with that despairing cry, Becky broke into hysterical tears. "I'll do anything you ask, if only you'll let me slip away! I'll set her free to go back to her father—"

"What!" gasped Betty and Polly. "What!"

Their startled voices must have told Becky—at last she had said something that really weighed with them.

Dropping a hand away from her wild, tearful eyes, she resumed in a feverish whisper:

"Yes, I will even do that, if only you'll make it a bargain! You can have it in writing—a few lines that you can give to Anna as soon as she is down; and then you'll see what it all means to her! Quick, where's a pencil and paper?"

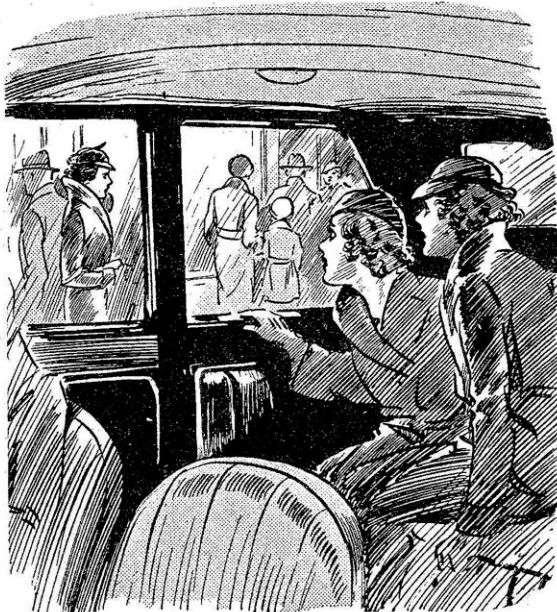
Polly whipped open one of the car's front doors and rummaged into a locker beside the instrument board. She found only a duster. But a companion locker at the other end yielded a pencil and a "shopping block"—tear-off slips of paper.

Becky's snatching at these writing materials proclaimed a frantic eagerness to carry out her despairing offer. Yet that eagerness was no greater than Betty and Polly's, to see the lines written that promised to be of such vital importance.

There was much about which the two Morcovians were in utter bewilderment; but one thing was crystal clear in their minds: In a way undreamt of they were to achieve their great objective!

They were, after all, to be the means of bringing Anna and her father together once again!

Becky stood beside the car, writing swiftly with the tiny sheet of paper held up to one



"There on the pavement—Becky Jervoise. Look, you can see her now!" Polly spoke sharply, and Betty was not surprised. It seemed as if Anna Goldring's stepsister was spying on her, and Betty was certain her motives were hostile.

of the windows as a support. A few moments, and she had dashed out the last line, had added her signature, and was turning about to offer the pencilled note to Betty.

"There! And if you doubt me; if you don't think it can be possible—read it! But I tell you that's a bargain, that is! It has taken of two girls to force it out of me! Two chits of schoolgirls—pah!"

Polly came to Betty's side, and—still barring the way out to Becky Jervoise—they read together:

"Anna,—This is to say that our compact is off, and you can see your father as often as you like after this. I hereby release you.

"And I really don't mind now, as I am going to be married, anyway!

"BECKY."

BOTH girls finished reading at the same instant. They looked at each other—Polly, tremendously excited, Betty outwardly calm.

Then Betty looked at the film star's stepsister.

"Right," said Betty, "you can go."

And in a moment Becky was gone!

The Truth at Last

WHAT a joke up their sleeves it was to Betty and Polly three hours later, to come down from their bed-room looking just as if nothing at all sensational had happened during the night.

"Morning, Mrs. Appleson!" they blithely called kitchenwards, where the farmer's wife was ready to whip sizzling rashers off the stove.

And then as they romped into the parlour, to find Anna standing before the jolly fire, looking at the morning paper:

"Morning, Anna! Did you have a good night?"

"Like a top. Don't go by my looks," was the plea, laughed mirthlessly. "I have just been reading—this."

The held open newspaper became tilted so that Betty and Polly were seeing the headlines as they drew closer.

"Knighthood for Poor Man's Doctor."

"Anna!" they shouted. "Oh, your father?"

"It's dad, yes," she nodded, looking very emotional. "You girls have no need to be told what it's for. Perhaps you may like to telegraph your congrats? I only wish I could."

"But you can!" cried Betty.

"My dears, no. I mustn't even communicate with him. You will think it so strange; his own daughter, and yet I mayn't—"

"But you may—now!" Betty again cried out.

"For, Anna, look!"

And she offered that little sheet of paper on which Becky Jervoise had scribbled those few lines three hours ago.

IN their favourite corner of the lounge at the Hotel Majestic when another day had ended some girls and boys were showing every sign of expectant pleasure.

All tongues were going, whilst many a pair of eyes watched the constant revolving of glass doors, letting people in from the damp-lit street by way of the front entrance.

Suddenly:

"Here they are!" several of the juniors broke off to exclaim, whilst others as quickly remarked:

"It's Betty and Polly—but where's Anna Goldring?"

Up jumped every one of them, to swarm to meet the two who were waving gaily as they came across the lounge.

"Hooray! Bekas—"

"Sh!" Excitable Naomer's shrill voice was checked, and indeed, the hubbub was going to be great enough without that.

Not until Betty and Polly had flopped into lounge chairs in that particular corner did the verbal bombardment cease.

Then with all these chums of theirs flopping down again into encircling seats, silence was accorded, so that eagerly awaited news might be given.

"We left Cawdry soon after three, and came along non-stop," Betty crisply stated. "Anna couldn't get away before as she simply had to do some of the shots. She's going down again to-morrow, first thing."

"But where is she now?" clamoured some of the listeners. "She brought you to the door?"

"And then went on to find her father," Betty sparkled. "She has gone home. Think of that, all of you. Gone home—to him!"

"Gee!" chortled Jack, who had been listening even whilst he quietly gave orders to a waiter for tea for the returned travellers. "We've been thinking about nothing else ever since you rang us up this morning."

"Bekas—gorjus!"

"Most gwaityfing, yes, wather! Bai Jove!" beamed Paula Creel. "It weally is!"

"What it is," Bunny exclaimed, silently clapping her hands; "a triumph for you two girls; a real win, if ever there was!"

"Well, we are feeling whoopee about it all," Polly blandly admitted. "You see, we pulled this off at a time when our hopes were at zero."

"But just how did you bring off such a wonderful coup?" clamoured Bunny Trevor. "It was so hard to understand over the 'phone. Something about that detestable Becky releasing Anna from a compact? But it's amazing that Anna should ever have entered into a compact with a stepsister, to go right out of her father's life."

"Incredible!" said others.

"But listen now," Betty rattled on. "Becky came into a lot of money about two years ago. That was when her mother died who was the doctor's second wife. Dr. Jervoise himself had very little money of his own. He gave so much of his time free to poor patients and the hospital. Anna has told us all this to-day; how her father's great dream was to get extensions for the hospital that were so desperately needed. At that time Anna had no idea she herself was going to become rich and famous as a film star. Becky saw how Anna was longing to be able to do something really big for her father, and so she suddenly offered to provide the money for the new wing out of her own private fortune—on terms."

"You mean that Anna was to clear out?"

"Absolutely! Becky hated Anna—wanted her out of the way. Anna's belief is that Becky expected Dr. Jervoise would be knighted some day, and anyhow, he would be a name to conjure with in Society. She wanted a clear field, and she got it. Out of love for her father Anna accepted Becky's secret offer. The money was given to the hospital for building the new wing, without the donor's name being made known."

"Oh!" listeners exclaimed in tones of boundless

admiration for what Anna had done. "Just fancy!"

"As fine of her as it was heartless of Becky," Judy Cardew murmured. "The one girl, all love for her father, and the other girl—self, self, all the time."

Polly, in a tone of fierce disgust, carried the strange story a step further.

"And yet after all Becky was not satisfied. When she found Anna suddenly becoming famous on the films, earning such huge money, she came out in a worse light than ever. Anna wanted to end the compact as soon as possible by secretly repaying the money as fast as it could be earned. She thought that Becky might relent towards her as soon as some of the money had been paid back. But no. Becky wanted to see the last penny back—"

"With interest!" Betty put in. "Poor Anna Goldring. For twelve months now she has been finding instalments of cash. It was one of those instalments which Polly and I took to Becky the other night at the doctor's house. Buying back the right to be near the father she loves—that's what Anna has been doing."

"It's pathetic," Madge Minden exclaimed softly. "And I suppose she would have had to go on paying, paying for months yet, if—"

"Another year at least," Betty nodded. "Only, last night's happenings at that farmhouse put an end to everything. Perhaps it's as well you girls weren't there this morning when Anna first knew that she was saved. The way she broke down in front of me and Polly—it showed how desperately she had been bearing up, carrying on so bravely, for two long years."

These were words that caused a pause in all the talk. Morcove & Co. could understand so well. Even the most skittish of Morcove girls, even such light-hearted fellows as Jack and Tom—they were stirred to the depths of their natures.

Presently the resumed conversation turned more particularly upon Becky and her motive for that secret visit to Cawdry.

The conclusion Betty and Polly had reached

was that the ill-disposed girl, losing her nerve over some desperate deed which she had intended to carry out, had resorted to the theft of those jewels on a sudden impulse, because the chance was there.

Nor could it be doubted that if she had got away with Anna's jewels last night Becky would have kept them, caring little if the theft were ultimately traced to her. She would have reckoned that she could always snap her fingers at Anna.

As it was, Morcove had done that for Anna, on top of all else. Betty and Polly had frustrated the attempted theft. They had been able to return the jewels to Anna in the same hour in which they had obtained for her the perfect right to return to her father:

At last Betty and Polly got up from their chairs. Taking up discarded outdoor things they were going to seek their bed-room and tidy up.

But this was the moment when Morcove & Co. were due for a fresh sensation.

"Why, look—look! Oh, there is Anna—she's just come in!"

And at Anna's side, even now, was her own dear father!

LIFE'S fateful way of bringing things full circle in the end.

Here, in this very lounge where Morcove & Co. had first set eyes upon famous Anna in the flesh; here, where they had first sat and talked with her, sensing even then some great longing unfulfilled—they were with her now, and it was well with her.

Selfless, noble-minded daughter of a selfless, noble-minded father, they had come along together like this, eager to find the juniors.

And Anna's lovely eyes at this moment; the smile upon her father's face!

Before ever a word could be spoken father and daughter had said, by looks alone, what undying gratitude would be theirs for all that Morcove had achieved.

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

A NEW TERM—AND A NEW PROBLEM

That is what confronts Betty Barton and her staunch chums on their return to Morcove School. And the problem is connected with—
A THREAT TO MORCOVE'S PROSPERITY!

Be sure to read—

"THE GIRL WHO RAN THE SCHOOL"

By MARJORIE STANTON

IN NEXT TUESDAY'S SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN