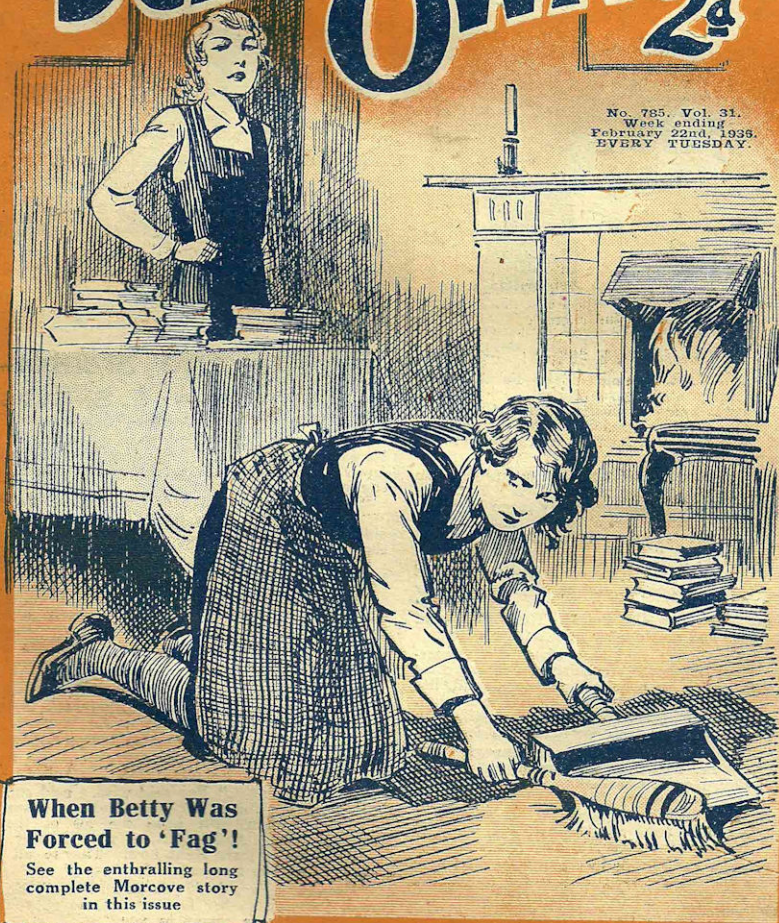


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"They Meant to Belittle Betty" GRAND COMPLETE STORY INSIDE

The SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN 2d

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Week ending
February 22nd, 1936.
EVERY TUESDAY.



**When Betty Was
Forced to 'Fag'!**

See the enthralling long
complete Morcove story
in this issue

FIVE MAGNIFICENT STORIES IN THIS ISSUE

Enthralling Complete Story of the Chums of Morcove School



They Meant to Belittle Betty

By Marjorie Stanton

ILLUSTRATED BY L. SHIELDS

Betty Barton—Rebel!

FAY DENVER, captain of the Form, sat in her study at Morcove School.

It was a Saturday afternoon—a time when any Form captain, under normal conditions, would be giving her mind only to some forthcoming hockey match.

But Fay was quite differently occupied. She was merely considering which of her charming frocks she should put on presently to go across to the Headland Hotel for a session of dancing—with tea in the lounge to follow!

Lots of other girls were going with Fay—nearly all the Form, in fact. As for hockey—well! If girls like Betty Barton, the ex-captain, and her chums of Study 12, cared to have a scratch game amongst themselves—let them! The majority of Morcovians had no time for games these days.

Carelessly it was said that when Miss Somerfield, the permanent headmistress, returned to the school, after an enforced absence abroad, life at Morcove was bound to switch back to normal. But few cared. Most of them felt justified in making the most of such unaccustomed freedom.

The study door opened just wide enough for a girl to put her head inside to speak.

"Oh, Fay, I quite intended to join the dancing-party for this afternoon, but now I find—"

"O.K., Pat! Please yourself!"

Pat Lawrence received this with the smile of one who had known what Fay's answer would be.

"I have something on in Barncombe that may keep me there until tea-time. But I would like to join you all at the Headland afterwards."

"Right-ho!"

And Pat backed clear of the doorway, exchanging a smile with Fay's sister, Edna, who was just coming in.

Edna, almost as pretty as Fay, looked every

bit as jaunty. She closed the door, then dropped down into an easy chair, assuming a posture more comfortable than elegant.

"Well, and what did Miss Dollond say, Fay?"

"About my having a fag? Oh," laughed the elder sister, "she thought it only right that I should!"

"How lovely!" grinned sprawling Edna. "So long as I am not to be the fag!"

"Don't worry," the newly-appointed captain chuckled. "It's understood that I choose a fag from among the girls who are not saying 'thank you' for the new state of things. So I think I'll begin with—"

"Someone out of Study 12?"

"Yes; Betty Barton!"

This so amused Edna that she lay back in her chair and kicked her heels up as she laughed.

"What a scream, Fay darling! Betty Barton, captain up till last Thursday evening, and now—she's got to fag for you! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Serve her right," Fay said with a cold smile. "I'll have her for a few days, and then change to Polly Linton. I'll have the lot of them, turn by turn. And"—getting up—"I may as well make the start right now. They're all in Study 12 at this moment, I dare say!"

"Yes; but—Fay, don't you go to them!" Edna cried, jumping to her feet. "Let me go round and tell Betty to report to you."

"Right-ho!" laughed Fay, coming away from the door. "And tell her she'll have to work hard. This study badly needs tidying up!"



"I see a cigarette-end on the carpet," Edna exclaimed, in a mock-shocked tone. "Is that one of yours, Fay, or one of mine? But I'm not going to pick it up. Let your fag do that!"

Mincing to the door, she passed from the study, which opened on to a little lobby. This latter was at the end of the main corridor serving all the other studies. As Edna emerged upon the corridor she saw instantly that Betty and Co. had just left their studies, dressed for hockey and carrying their sticks. So she called out—loftily, as she felt entitled to do, being the present captain's sister:

"Betty Barton—just a moment!"

Nearly at the stairs end of the passage, Betty and her chums paused and looked round.

"Just report to the captain, will you, Betty?" requested Edna when she had slowly sauntered up.

"What for?"

"Oh—something about your fagging for her, I

**Unable to Bend Betty to
their Will—the Dollonds mean
to Humiliate her at Morcove!**

fancy. But go along to her study, and you'll soon see!"

Betty was a good one at taking things as they came. She did not fly into a temper; instead she shook her head.

"Sorry—I'm going to play hockey!" she told Edna.

"Then," Edna called after them as they began to walk away, "am I to tell my sister—"

Betty flashed round.

"You can tell your sister that I feel I'd like a bit of hockey practice, and I'm going to get it—that's all!"

"Right!"

And so Edna turned back, whilst the chums of Study 12 proceeded upon their way downstairs.

It was not long before Polly exploded into speech.

"So that's the latest, is it! A fag for the captain—and she picks upon you, Betty! Isn't that just like Fay Denver?"

"It's meant to humiliate Betty, of course," came Pam Willoughby's scornful comment. "Well, it should make some of the other girls realise how silly they were to put Fay in your place as captain."

"Morcove's rotting to bits," Judy Cardew agreed. "A whole day off on Saturday—of course, we know it's nice, in a way, and yet it isn't right."

"And look at the field, now!"

This was Polly's bitter exclamation as they all gained the open air. Morcove's two games fields were almost deserted—at a time when, had the old order still existed, there should have been at least two teams mustering for hockey, to say nothing of groups of girls booked for other games.

"It's doing tremendous harm—we know it is," Betty said in a steady voice. "But even now I don't despair of being able to stop the Dollonds' little game. I'm only waiting until I find out whether—hallo, though!" she broke off, changing to a much brighter tone, whilst her right hand pointed towards the school gateway. "Look!"

They looked—and brightened up at once.

"Oh, the boys are here!"

"Fancy! All five of them—"

"Yes, bai Jove! Hooway, goals—"

"Bekas—gorjus! Ooo, queek, queek!" was Naomer's shrill cry as she galloped to meet the surprise arrivals from Grangemoor School. "Zey can stop—"

"They can help us to get a game!"

"Yes!"

Pam at once turned back to the schoolhouse, meaning to collect extra hockey-sticks for the boys, so certain was it that they would joyfully join in. Betty and the rest hurried forward to meet the Grangemoor "Die Hards"—as the five called themselves.

Three of them had each a sister amongst the Study 12 chummers, and the remaining two had always been just as welcome at Morcove as members of a really jolly crowd of chums. So here they were, "parking" their bicycles just inside the gateway in the old accustomed way.

And, except for certain remarks which called for a sincere gravity, Grangemoor was full of the old accustomed jollity.

Very earnestly the boys condoled with Betty on her loss of the captaincy. Also there were genuinely sympathetic references to Miss Merrick, the Form-mistress, at present in hospital on account of a motor accident.

"And likely to be there for another week, at least, you say? What foul luck," Jack said. "At a time like this, too! Miss Merrick is one of the best. I guess it would have made a difference if she had been still about, instead of in bed."

But this first burst of talk between the girls and boys was taking a cheerful turn by the time Pam came up with a whole sheaf of hockey-sticks.

Straight to midfield they all proceeded, and a minute later a ding-dong battle began between Grangemoor and Morcove. A scratch game it might be—but it was none the less keen.

Now and then Betty and Co. even felt that Morcove was really itself again! Like old times to be playing "visitors"! The cheers with which all of them greeted a brilliant goal by the Morcovians made up for the absence of lookers-on.

Suddenly, however, Fay Denver came striding across the turf in a most self-important way. She called "Stop!" to the players—not that they took any notice of her!

"Stop, I tell you!"

And still the little white ball was knocked by the hockey-sticks. The Morcove goal was in danger now. Some desperate work by a couple of the girls just saved it. Then, with Fay Denver actually on the field of play, voicing her insistent "Stop, will you!" the ball was suddenly harried to the other side.

"Goal! Goal again—hurrah!"

This time it was Betty who had scored for her side. She had no sooner enjoyed the delight of seeing the ball flash into the Grangemoor goal, after a most adroit stroke, than a hand fell upon her shoulder and simply dragged her round.

It was Fay whom she faced, Fay's hand which Betty instantly flung off, whilst the infuriated captain panted:

"Go indoors! Go up to my study and stay there till I come!"

In Quest of a Clue!

"Do you hear me?" the new captain raged, stamping her foot with impatience.

"I heard, you quite a minute ago——"

"And you took no notice!" Fay caught Betty up whilst the rest of the players gathered round. "Right! You shall pay for it, Betty Barton! You seem to forget that you are not the captain now!"

"You seem to take good care to remember that you are!" Polly interposed hotly.

Fay glared at her.

"I'm not talking to you! It's Betty who is to fag for me! If you don't go, Betty, when I tell you——"

"Well, I'm not going," the ex-captain declared, with a calmness which Fay must have envied. "Saturday afternoon has always been a time for games, and I intend to play hockey."

"Everybody else is doing as they please!" Bunny now burst in. "So why shouldn't we! Especially as we are only doing what is——"

"All I've got to say to you, Bunny Trevor," Fay flashed, "is that your brother has no right to be here——"

"Oh, yes, he has!"

"Who says so?"

"Miss Somerfield has always——"

"Atlantic!" Fay sneered. "You boys can all go clear out, sharp!" she addressed the five. "You have no right to be on the place at all!"

"Right," Jack said blandly. "Take our names, then, and we'll take it to the House of Lords. Test case, boys!"

The Study 12 girls burst out laughing. Jack's cheeky flippancy was more than a match for Fay's spiteful authority. She must have realised, too, that to remain would only mean having her "authority" flouted, for suddenly she wheeled round and strode furiously away.

Then the hockey was resumed, on a suggestion from Tom Trevor—received with ringing cheers—"Finish the game first, and then deal with the enemy!"

Presently Betty and Co. were aware of a crowd of girls setting off on their bicycles for the short run to the Headland Hotel, where there was to be a so-called dancing class.

Muriel Dollond herself, as well as the new captain, was with the large party and, in spite of the excitement of the game, many of the Study

12 players marvelled that the daughter of the temporary headmistress did not come striding across to create fresh trouble.

Or were the players to find Mrs. Dollond herself coming out to them presently?

There was, of course, that possibility, but nothing of the sort occurred. Instead, Betty and Co. and the boys were left to finish their game, although the field of play was in full view from the headmistress' window.

But the most amazing thing of all happened when the hockey players were all sauntering to the schoolhouse.

A car went by them on the drive, at such a short distance from them they could see the temporary headmistress as its one passenger. She could not have failed to see all of them, and yet she did not take the slightest notice.

When she might have been expected to stop the car and get down to create a scene she simply ignored the girls and their visitors.

It was an occurrence which left most of the Study 12 chums agape. As for Betty, she felt worried!

"Can it mean," she exclaimed to those with whom she was walking, "that Mrs. Dollond really is a believer in lax ways? I've been saying it's all a trick, a cunning plan of hers—to let girls do as they please——"

"So it is, Betty," said Pam quickly. "Don't you begin to think that you were in the wrong, after all. Out of the ruins of Morcove School—that woman means to found her own school, when the time comes!"

"Well, it has seemed as clear as crystal to me, girls. But I wonder she did not make a big fuss, just then, when we've got the boys with us, and most likely she doesn't even know who they are!"

"We haven't reported, either," Jack grinned, "although we are going to, now. Gosh, chaps, we'd better not halloo before we are out of the wood. She may have left orders!"

"We're to be thrown out?" chuckled Tom.

"That's about it!" Jack grimly inferred.

But again there was a complete absence of opposition. Indoors, Grangemoor found only Miss Massingham of the Fifth Form to report to formally. She was bleak; but then she always had been bleak, even in Miss Somerfield's time. She merely said, coldly, that she had no objection to the boys staying for tea with the girls, but they must have it at the school tables.

"My hat!" Polly suddenly exploded, as soon as they were alone again. "I see what it means! Oh, the artfulness—the——"

"Why, what, Polly—what?" was the eager chorus.

"That Dollond woman is only too glad that we are in bounds this afternoon! We're welcome to have the boys in to tea! That's why she said nothing!"

"Then it does suit her book——"

"Of course, it does!" Polly rushed on. "Don't you see? She has gone out in the car, and it's a thousand to one she has gone to pay another visit to Southmoor—that property which we suspected her of intending to buy——"

"And which her daughter says they have no intention of buying!" was Bunny's dry rejoinder. "Polly's got it! That's where the car is taking our esteemed—ahem!—headmistress!"

"Then—all of us!" Betty said, eagerly. "How about our biking along to Southmoor straight away? We won't let her see us, if she is there, but we can have another shot at obtaining final proof——"

"That's the thing to do, boys!" Jack

applauded the suggestion joyously. "Fall in the Die-Hards! Corporal Tubby, you don't mind going without tea, do you?"

Whether he did or didn't, portly Tubby had to abandon, with his pals, all idea of enjoying that "official" tea which the girls had been going to supplement by bringing cakes and pastries down from the Study 12 ladder.

Away went the Grangemoor five, to recover their bicycles, whilst Betty and Co. hurried to the cycle-sheds to get out their own machines. Betty felt that the next hour or so might produce results of tremendous importance.

If only they could obtain fresh evidence against the Dollonds so that every girl in the school would simply have to realise that there really had been good cause for Betty's grave accusation in the first instance!

A few days ago, a bold falsehood had enabled Betty's grave charge to be refuted, and herself lowered in the esteem of many Morcovians. Muriel Dollond had publicly denied that her mother was negotiating for Southmoor. But now—

What worth would that denial still have if it could be proved that the temporary headmistress had been again to look at the property, and was even arranging to complete the purchase?

But no such luck was granted the ex-captain and her many companions. After their two-mile run at full pelt, they reached Southmoor only to find it in a state of utter desolation. Not a soul was about, nor did Mrs. Dollond or anyone else turn up.

Had she been here and gone before they arrived upon the scene? As it had rained heavily in the night, fresh-made tyre-marks, at the turn-in off the road would have induced the girls and boys to believe that there had been a lightning visit.

But they could discover no new-looking tracks. On the other hand, there was one thing they had to notice which caused many a rueful grimace.

The agent's board, offering the property "FOR SALE" was still up!

"Oh, bother!" Polly raged. "Then Mrs. Dollond hasn't bought the place yet?"

"Unless," Bunny comfortingly suggested, "it's sold, and the agents haven't had time to get the board taken down."

"They wouldn't take it down, even if it was sold," Dave Cardew remarked in that level tone of his.

"They wouldn't?" several of the girls said in chorus.

"Not they," Dave calmly responded. "They'd be certain to paste a 'Sold' notice across it as a good advertisement for their firm."

"Oh, hang! You're a nice comforter, you are!" Polly stormed at him irritably. "That only makes it all the more certain than ever that it isn't sold!"

"Of course, it does!"

"Then—ugh!" Polly fumed, so furiously that some of the others burst out laughing. "As long as that 'For Sale' board stays like that—how can Betty or anyone else accuse the Dollonds again?"

"You've said a mouthful, Polly-wolly," her brother commented genially. "And so, boys"—meaning the girls as well—"what about biking on to Barncombe now and getting some tea at the Creamery?"

"Or shall we," cried Bunny merrily, "make for the Headland Hotel? Just as near, and—"

"No!" Betty struck in decisively. "We'll do only what we would have done if Miss Somerfield had been still at Morcove. It was the Creamery then; let it be the Creamery now."

And, of all who heard the ex-captain advance this quiet plea, not one demurred. Instead, they looked at her with a sudden sympathetic understanding. They realised to the full, how earnestly she wanted to keep the school true to the old traditions.

And so it was to the Creamery they went—to have tea among its quaint atmosphere of bygone days. And, as they sat there, watching the fire-light glinting cheerfully on the china, did they, in imagination, catch the happy laughter which had filled the little tea-place on other—and brighter—occasions?



"Either you will do your fagging between now and tomorrow midday, or you'll not go to see Miss Merrick!" the temporary headmistress said sourly. "You are given your choice. Make it!" Betty knew then it was no use hoping to get justice here.

When Betty Had to Choose

*"The Cottage Hospital,
Barncombe."*

"MY dear Betty,
"By the same post I have written to the temporary headmistress, asking her to let you come to see me to-morrow (Sunday) afternoon, as that is the time for visitors.
"I am longing to see you, as there is much that I want to talk about. If only you can come along, I am sure the visit will do me a world of good—taking a great deal of anxiety off my mind—"

Such was a portion of the letter which Betty found had come for her by the six o'clock delivery this Saturday evening.

She was giving it a second reading, having opened it only a few moments since, in the front hall of the schoolhouse.

She had found it while posting one of her own. It was, of course, from the Form-mistress.

"Is the headmistress back yet, Ellen? I know she went out in the car this afternoon—"

"Yes, miss; but she got in an hour ago—and she's alone, I think."

"Oh, right—thanks!"

And Betty, as she hurried away, let a smile show how much she appreciated the goodwill which parlourmaid Ellen had implied. An old favourite with Study 12, Ellen!

A mahogany door at the far end of a ground-floor passage, bearing the painted word, PRIVATE. A door that Betty had tapped so often in other days, whilst smiling in anticipation of the kindly welcome she was sure of receiving; but now—

Miss Somerfield was thousands of miles away, on the other side of the Atlantic, and in her place was a woman who, for her own crafty reasons, was simply undoing all Miss Somerfield's good work.

With such a thought as this in her mind, no wonder Betty was looking stern as she entered, after hearing a careless "Come in!" in response to her knock.

Mrs. Dollond was seated away from her desk, at the fireside, reading a huge-sheeted document that looked very legal. Some agreement or other in connection with Southmoor, Betty wondered?

"Yes, what do you want?"

"I think you have had a note from Miss Merrick, in hospital, about my being allowed to visit her to-morrow afternoon."

"Oh, you are Betty Barton, of course! I didn't recognise you," said the temporary headmistress, hastily folding up the document and taking it to the desk. There, as Betty noticed, Mrs. Dollond put, it very carefully out of sight under other papers.

"You ask a favour, Betty Barton—and yet you are the very girl who objects." Mrs. Dollond laughed carelessly, "to other girls being—indulged."

"I ask for nothing that Miss Somerfield would not have granted at once. There's a big difference, surely, between—"

"Oh, never mind about Miss Somerfield! For the time being I am the headmistress—and you happen to be the one scholar who has taken exception to my methods! But there, I can afford to dismiss all that with contempt, being well aware that the whole school has done the same. More to the point, now—I was told just now that you have refused to fag for the new captain?"

"Yes, Mrs. Dollond. I'm sorry, but—"

"The new captain has been granted special

permission to have a fag. In refusing to comply, you will be showing defiance—not to her, understand, but to me!"

"I'm quite aware of that; but—"

"What a perverse girl you are, Betty Barton!" flared out the headmistress, with the irritability of a weakling. "You protest that easier conditions are going to ruin the school, and yet when you are asked to submit to a mild form of fagging—a system in force in hundreds of schools—you don't like it!"

"Mrs. Dollond, if you'll please let me state my objection," Betty spiritedly exclaimed.

"Where it seems to me so unfair—"
"Unfair! There is no unfairness, girl! And now I tell you this. Either you will do your fagging between now and to-morrow midday, or—you'll not go to see Miss Merrick!"

"Mrs. Dollond—"

"No more!" And an outstretched hand pointed Betty to the door. "You are given your choice. Make it!"

Betty's immediate bow, followed by a dignified withdrawal from the room, represented another suppression of burning indignation. Her choice was already made. That she had been confronted with it was cruelly unfair, but this was not a time to think of the personal humiliation which acceptance meant; rather was it a time to think only of Miss Merrick, lying there in hospital, waiting to see her.

So, less than a minute later, stoical Betty rejoined certain of her chums in Study 12 and, after showing them the letter, announced quietly:

"I am going round now, girls, to the captain's study, to say I'll fag for her."

"What!" gasped Polly, and she, who held the letter, dropped it to the table. "Fag for Fay, after all!"

"Good gracious, Betty dear!"

"Bekas—what ze diggings! Sweendle!"

"Downright shame—a scandal!" cried Bunny.

"If I were you, Betty—"

"It's the price I've been asked to pay, for the 'privilege' of going to see Miss Merrick—"

"Privilege!" Polly echoed, furiously. "To be allowed out on a Sunday afternoon, to go and see one's Form-mistress in hospital! As if this letter from Miss Merrick doesn't make it clear, she is—"

"Only too clear, dear," Betty agreed. "That's why I'm determined to see her, whatever the price."

"Other girls can do just as they please," Polly said, with rising anger, striding about the study. "They'll be free to do anything they like, 'all day to-morrow'! Do you know that some of them are going to the Headland for tea at four, to listen to the band? The school is going to rot—quickly!" Polly almost raved. "Betty! What are we going to do?"

"Go on ze strike, eef you ask me!" piped in the dusky one. "Bekas, we could lay in provisions, and lock ourselves up somewhere, and—"

"You be quiet!" Polly snorted. "I want to know how these Dollonds can be outed—soon! Betty! That agent for the Southmoor property must know whether or not Mrs. Dollond has bought it for a school, or is going to—buy it."

"You think he'd tell us? I've been wondering," Betty nodded as she turned to let herself out of the study. "He might—if he didn't know why we wanted the information. But Mrs. Dollond may have warned him to keep it a secret. Anyhow, nothing can be done until next week."

She passed from the room, standing all by herself with a troubled look after drawing the door

shut. From some of the other studies came sounds suggesting sheer hooliganism. They were not the old accustomed noises due to the boisterous spirits. Slowly she went on to the captain's study—HER study, up to a few days ago, and now she must enter it—only as a fag!

It was not that she was a girl who easily gave way to despair, but of the vast number of girls there were only so few who seemed to see the danger, and of those few—only her ever-loyal chums who were as powerless as she to stave off disaster.

Fagging for Fay!

BETTY tapped, as she always did before entering any study except her own.

"Who is it?" questioned the haughty voice of the new captain. "Busy!"

Peals of laughter, from girls who were with Fay, told Betty what a flippant pretence that "Busy!" was. She turned the knob of the door and went in.

Round the small study table sat four girls, playing cards. They had just ended a game and the cards were being collected for a fresh deal. It was Fay who sat facing the doorway. Betty saw her tilting back in her chair, flushed of face. A faint scent of cigarette smoke was noticeable.

"Hallo, you!" Fay said, with studied rudeness. "What do you want?"

Edna, sitting with her back to the door, was picking up the cards. She looked round to see who it was, then tittered the remark:

"Force of habit! Thought it was still her study!"

Pat Lawrence laughed, so did the fourth player, Elsie Drew.

"I'm ready to do my bit of fagging, Fay, whenever you like," Betty said very steadily.

"Oho! Well, it's too late this evening; we shan't finish our game until Assembly. Call round in the morning."

"And don't forget to bring your insurance card," added Edna, shuffling the pack.

Pat and Elsie laughed again.

"Get down early, and you can get the study done before brekker," the new captain said airily. "And mind, I don't want to see you in a coarse apron. Print frocks in the morning!"

Betty drew back into the lobby and closed the door just as gently as if none of those insulting things had been said. But when she would have gone back to Study 12 she found that she dare not.

So upset was she about the terrible state of the school to-night, she dreaded having to talk to any of her chums.

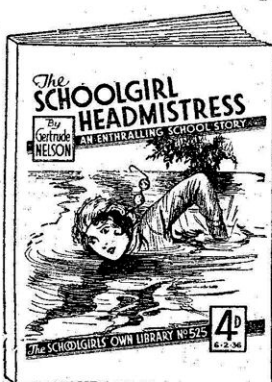
IN the wan light of daybreak she was out of bed and getting dressed very quietly, before any one else was awake.

(Continued on the next page.)

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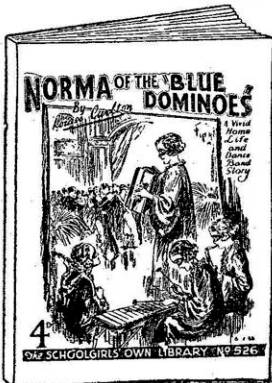


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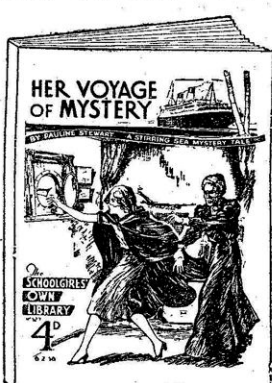


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No. 526



No. 527

Resolute to comply with every condition, irksome and unfair though it was, so that on no account could any excuse be found for anyone saying that she had not earned the "privilege" after all!

Fay's study was in a disgraceful state. Betty could tell, the moment she got to it, that the new captain and her sister had done all they could to make this morning's clearing-up a really arduous task. It was as if the room had been deliberately turned upside down.

More than one cigarette-end was lying about, and the carpet was covered with all the litter from a wastepaper-basket, including tiny scraps of torn-up papers.

Fortunately, Betty was a domesticated girl. She borrowed things from the housemaids' department, downstairs, that would enable her to get the job done quickly and efficiently.

Fifteen minutes later, the study was looking much better. Then it flashed upon Betty that the sisters might have set a trap for her, wanting to be able to accuse her of scamping the work.

She wheeled aside a low armchair, and there where it had stood was some litter which, quite obviously, had been placed out of sight.

Betty, applying dustpan and broom to this patch of carpet, was smiling fiercely to herself. They had not caught her after all! She wheeled the armchair back into its original position, and was standing to take a last look round, feeling that there simply was nothing more to do, when Fay Denver stalked in.

"Hallo, made a start, have you?"

"I've finished!"

"Oh, finished! But just you wait until I've had a look round!" snapped Fay. "Finished, have you!"

As that word was repeated, in a doubting tone, Betty saw the new captain dart to the armchair and pull it about by a hand laid upon the high back of it.

The castors squeaked as the chair was violently shifted, and then came Fay's accusing cry:

"What about this? Look, where this chair was standing, Betty Barton—all this muck—"

"It was not there a moment ago—"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you have just dropped those biscuit crumbs out of your hand. As you put your hand to the back of the chair—"

"Liar!"

Betty could not stand that. She advanced towards the new captain.

"Don't you call me that again, Fay Denver!"

"Well, I do! I call you a worthless little liar to scamp the work and then try to make out that you have done everything!"

Betty's right hand, tightly clenched, was lifted. But she dropped it and next moment it came open. Although she still stood so close to handsome Fay, that sudden impulse to slap the girl across the face was already conquered.

And Fay laughed, provokingly.

"Thought better of it, have you?" she jeered. "In case you might not be allowed to go to see Miss Merrick after all, this afternoon. But, let me tell you, you won't go now—I'll take good care about that!"

"Will you?"

"Yes, I will!"

Betty's nod was equivalent to the acceptance of a challenge.

In vain the new captain smiled goadingly. She could not draw another word from this girl whom she had always longed to humiliate.

Without even another glance, Betty walked out.

For as long as it took her to go downstairs with the dustpan and other things, and then return to Study 12, she was able to remain outwardly calm. But when she entered Study 12 to find Polly and others there, something in her chums' sympathising looks took emotional effect upon her. She felt herself starting to tremble.

"You poor dear," Polly exclaimed a trifle huskily. "Oh, dash!" came with the next breath. "If this goes on—well, you all know what I am!"

"Betty dear," Paula said, quite distressfully. "You were up vewy early, surely! Hev you weally been fagging?"

"Yes; I've done simply everything to comply with the condition. Don't look like that, girls. They hoped, no doubt, that I would refuse—"

"But the injustice to you—"

"Never mind about that now. Only, I want to say one thing."

Betty closed the door, then resumed:

"It looks as if I am to be told to stay in bounds to-day, after all. I've done everything I had to do, as Fay's fag, and yet I am not to be allowed—"

"What! Betty, surely you won't stand for that?"

"No," she answered Polly's gasped exclamation. "My mind is quite made up. I have earned the right to go to see Miss Merrick this afternoon, and so I shall go. Nobody—nobody shall stop me, now—"

"Stuff to give zem!" Naomer applauded softly. "Bekas, of all ze swendeels—to get you to do ze fagging, and zen not let you go, after all!"

"Anything we can do, Betty?"

"No, thanks, Polly dear, except take care not to say anything outside this study about what I have made up my mind to—"

"St!"

That was Bunny, throwing up a warning finger as the voice of Madeleine Dollond came from just outside the study.

For a moment the chums stood prepared for a sudden entrance. Then they could tell that Madeleine Dollond was lingering in the corridor, chatting most cordially with several girls. It was all light talk, proclaiming the intention to spend Sunday in that "do as you please" fashion which the Dollonds were encouraging.

Then Madeleine Dollond stepped round to the new captain's study. She was there for a minute or two, talking with Fay, after which she came on to Study 12.

Standing by the held-open door, she said sharply:

"You quite understand, Betty Barton—you will not go to see Miss Merrick to-day."

"But—"

"Oh, I can't argue. You have too much to say—always!"

She went away, leaving the door open. Polly, in one of her furies, strode to it and drove it shut with a loud SLAM!

"It's all right," said Betty thoughtfully. "I shall manage."

And she was as good as her word.

At half-past one that afternoon most of her chums gathered in Study 12, knowing that she had already slipped away. From the study window they could see her riding her bicycle which she had secured by creeping out to the cycle-sheds the moment the school had finished dinner.

There was time for the girls at the window to watch her ride out of sight upon the open road to Barncombe, and then Judy, hastily entered, softly voicing a warning.

"They know! I've just heard Fay Denver

asking the Dollond girl if she should go after Betty by car, but she was told not to."

"No pursuit, is that it? Then," Polly grimly inferred, "you may depend there is to be a punishment for Betty when she gets back."

"If there is," Bunny muttered, "we'll have something to say."

"If there is," headstrong Polly echoed fiercely, "girls, there'll be something for us to do, then! We're not going to stand by, seeing Betty—"

"Look out— 'Sh!"

Once again there was Madeleine Dollond's now familiar step just outside the study. Next moment she was looking into the room.

"Where's Betty Barton?" "Why ask?" Polly coolly retorted. "When you have been told by Fay Denver that Betty has—"

"Gone to the hospital, has she?"

Polly drew herself up, facing Madeleine Dollond.

"I prefer to put it in other words: Betty has claimed the outing to which she was entitled!"

That said, Polly turned her back upon the headmistress' daughter, who remained tight-lipped for several moments. Then:

"When Betty Barton returns, you will tell her she is to report to me—at once! She shall have a week in detention for this. I'll send her to the detention-room—"

Polly flashed round.

"If you do—"

"There is no 'if,' girl! And I don't want any impudence from YOU!"

She added, as she drew back to the passage: "Take care that some of you don't get the same as Betty Barton is going to get!"

In the study there was a tense silence until Madeleine's step had died away, then Polly laughed.

"We'll take jolly good care!"

Without saying more than that she suddenly went from the study. It was a moment for much going and coming out of rooms by other girls, who were evidently inclined to spend the afternoon like an old-time "halfer."

For a while some piano-music, sounded from the music-room. Some girl or other was banging out "the latest," and it made Polly think of the music she used to hear Madge or Pam playing, on those happy yet orderly Sunday afternoons in other terms.

The pity of it! A fine school like Morcove going to bits! The cunning in all this change, too! For there was not the slightest doubt that girls, given all this license, would be full of discontent should the school revert to its old ways.

It must rest, of course, with parents, whether their girls remained at Morcove or not; but a girl can do a lot to influence "dad" and "mumsie" by the letters she writes home to them.



"You dropped those crumbs out of your hand!" Betty declared hotly. She didn't mind fagging for Fay in order to get permission to see Miss Merrick in hospital, but she was not going to be treated like this.

And so, out of so many for whom the net had been spread, the Dollonds might expect to make quite a useful haul.

Unless—
That word was very recurrent in Polly's bitter thoughts as she sauntered about, all by herself.

"Unless we get hold of better proof than we have obtained up till now—unless we are to do something soon—soon!"

"—With But a Single Thought!"

BUT Polly had not come out of doors merely to drift about in a moody, aimless way. It was simply to avoid drawing watchful, suspicious eyes upon herself that she spent a full half-hour wandering round before going to the place she had had in mind when first she left Study 12.

The school chimes, when they sounded a quarter-past two, had seldom sounded louder to her ears. For she was at the base of that very building—a most ornamental stone-built tower—which held the great clock that gave Morcove its time.

An iron-studded oak door was massive enough to be in keeping with walls so strong. From where, in concealment amongst some surrounding shrubs, she had done some eager peering, Polly suddenly ran to that door, greatly rejoicing that the key was in the lock.

Rustily the hasp went back as she worked the key, for perhaps only once a week did anyone

pass through this doorway, and that would only be the appointed person whose duty it was to keep the clock wound.

Another moment, and Polly was slipping past the half-open door. She pushed it to, and stood in semi-darkness on a stone floor from which stone steps ascended in corkscrew fashion.

There were no windows down here, but, as she climbed the winding stairway, light was afforded by slot-like openings suited to a building that copied the medieval style.

And then suddenly she checked and stood quite still.

A faint sound from below. Somebody coming after her? She had tried so hard to avoid being seen entering the clock-tower.

Tensely she listened to the faint clack-clack of that ascending step. She had been half-way up when she first heard it, and upon her right hand, where she stood, a narrow door opened off a cramped stone landing into a small store-room, and it occurred to her—just in case it was someone who did not, after all, know she was here, it would be a good thing to dart inside and try to hide.

Quick as a flash she tiptoed into the stone-walled chamber, which was lumbered up with outdoor stuff requiring to be kept under cover during the winter.

Stacks of folded garden seats, some tennis-posts, a croquet-box, and similar articles, had been brought here by the gardeners as an overflow from storage-sheds in the grounds. Writting between one dump and another, Polly quickly reached the dimmest corner, and squatted there—certainly out of sight of anyone who might only peep into the store-room.

But, a few seconds later, someone came right into the room, and to Polly's utter amazement, it was Naomer!

That dusky imp was mysteriously burdened with two large parcels—one hugged under an arm, the other hugged up to her chest. The astonished eyes of Polly Linton saw, also, that Naomer's dark-skinned face was charged with a look of intense excitement.

"Bekas," the "kid" was starting to whisper to herself, when up rose Polly from behind a screening pile of deck-chairs. Whereupon Naomer changed to a very startled:

"Ooo! What ze diggings!" and promptly dropped the parcels.

"Bekas," the "kid" was starting to whisper "What's the idea, kid? Following me about—"

"Not ze bit of eeb, Polly! Bekas, I didn't know you were here!"

"You didn't? Then why—"

"Bekas, you never know, that's why, Polly! Suppose we have to go on ze strike! Is that what you've been thinking, like me? But I've done better than you! Bekas—look! I've brought along some food already, in case!"

"Huh!" Polly grimaced. "Case of great minds thinking alike! But you needn't look as if you were simply dying for a strike."

"Why, aren't you?" Naomer returned roguishly, whilst seeking hiding-places for both parcels.

"No, I'm not! But I don't mind saying I did come here to see how it would serve, supposing the worst comes to the worst! There is something about this clock tower—"

"Gorjus! Zat is just what I've been zinking. Bekas, feefy times better zan ze atties, Polly! What ze diggings, zey could never get you out of here."

"Couldn't they? But, anyway, it's the best

place I can think of, and so don't make a row, in case anyone is outside!"

"I am going to killet—some more things to eat and bring zem across," was Naomer's enthusiastic whisper as she tiptoed away.

For a full quarter of an hour after that Polly was all by herself in the tower, her prowling about resulting in an enhanced opinion of the place as a potential stronghold if—if the worst should happen!

Then she might have made a stealthy return to the schoolhouse, but a last peering out let her in for a big surprise.

She could see Betty, already coming along from the town, on her bicycle. As early as this the chum who had done the run to Barncombe was returning, and Polly's amazement expressed itself in a muttered:

"What on earth!"

Out of the clock-tower she went, and some skilful dodging along shrub-bordered paths got her to the main gateway just as Betty reached it.

At sight of Polly the ex-captain at once jumped from her bicycle.

"Had to come back without seeing Miss Merrick," Betty sadly accounted for her early return and also her upset look. "They wouldn't let me go in to her ward."

"You mean," Polly jerked, "there had been a message from the school—one of the Dollonds—to stop you?"

"Oh, no; worse than that, dear."

And Betty added, tragically:

"In the night Miss—Miss Merrick became seriously ill!"

Ready for Conflict I

"BETTY" gasped Polly in heartfelt dismay.

"Oh, how rotten!"

"She was going on so splendidly and then suddenly some sort of blood-poisoning set in. Of course, they wouldn't tell me much—only that she could not be allowed any visitors."

"Poor Miss Merrick!" Polly said lumpily at last. "As if things weren't bad enough without that! There was never a time when we needed her so badly as we do now. Betty dear, and supposing—oh, supposing she doesn't get well again, ever! Supposing she—"

"Sh! It does, I know, make you realise all she has been to us; but we must hope and pray that she will come through all right."

To Betty, as she said this, there came a mental picture of the youthful Form-mistress who had been so deservedly adored. And it was whilst this vision still endured of one so dearly loved, that Betty and Polly both saw Madeleine Dollond suddenly in front of them, self-important, angry-looking—in every respect how different from Miss Merrick!

"So you are back, are you?"

"Yes, Miss Dollond. I'm sorry—"

"Too late to talk of being sorry, my girl! you were told you must not go—"

"Oh, I don't mean I'm sorry about that," Betty disdainfully interrupted. "Have you heard? Poor Miss Merrick has taken a turn for the bad. There is high fever now—delirium—"

"So you didn't see her, after all? Well, I'm sorry, too—that I can't let that make any difference, Betty Barton!" And the headmistress' imperious daughter smiled cruelly.

"Here, take hold of this machine!" she said with sudden ferocity to Polly at the same time pulling the bicycle out of Betty's hands. "And now you, Betty Barton—come with me!"

Crash! Polly let the bicycle fall to the ground. "Stop!" she cried angrily. "Miss Dollond—I warn you!"

The young woman, still gripping Betty by one arm, flashed round upon the other girl.

"And what, pray, do you warn me about?" she demanded icily.

"Some of us will make a stand, that's all!"

"I'd like to know how?"

"Wait and see!"

And Polly, picking up the fallen bicycle, wheeled it away to the shed. Then she raced up to Study 12 in a white heat of anger.

Bunny, Naomer, Paula and one or two others were gathered there.

"Betty," she announced grimly, "is in the detention-room!"

"Oh, shame—disgwaceful!" The others were all speaking together. "But, Polly, what brought Betty back so soon?"

shall want—keep it higher up, amongst ze works of the clock? And eef eet stops ze clock—good job!"

"This kid will keep butting in, or I might say just how I think we ought to go to work," Polly grimly remarked to her very attentive audience. "I say we can't all do it, but those who do will simply refuse to come out so long as Betty is still in detention! The Dollonds will have to give in! They won't dare to let a downright strike go on!"

"About some of us staying out," Pam carried on the debate, very softly. "I think I had better be one. It may help if I am able to get home to Swanlake. My parents are abroad, but I can do quite a lot, I hope—acting on my own."

"Shall I be another to stay out?" Judy suggested, in her earnest way. "We don't know—perhaps we may need to keep in touch with the boys at Grangemoor?"



"Oo! What ze diggings!" Naomer exclaimed startledly at sight of Polly, and promptly dropped the parcels. Polly glared angrily. What did Naomer mean by following her here, when secrecy was so imperative?

In a few words the angry Polly told the distressing news about Miss Merrick; then she fiercely reverted to the great injustice Betty was receiving.

"And so—what?" clamoured Bunny, reading a desperate intention in Polly's looks.

"This, girls! If, by half-past eight in the morning, Betty is still being kept away from us, then I, for one, will not go into class at nine! I mean it—"

"Same here!" cried Naomer, clapping her brown hands. "Bekas, by zat time, we shall be quite all right for going on ze strike—hooray! I told you so! And jolly good job that I—"

"Sh'rr'p, kid! Shouting it all over the place! But, listen! That clock-tower is the right place in heaps of ways. But—the room half-way up won't hold us all."

"What ze diggings, Polly, if we throw out all ze deck-chairs and zings? As for all ze food we

"Yes, that's all right," Polly promptly agreed. "And, look here, we'll fix up a code of signals between the clock-tower and this study. You can just see across to it from this window!"

The talk did not end there. For half an hour longer ways and means were discussed in guarded tones, and it proved to be just as well that the chums had kept their voices low, for Edna Denver was caught listening outside.

Polly it was who suddenly tiptoed to the door, whipped it open—and took the captain's sister quite by surprise. But Edna, quite unabashed, simply laughed in Polly's face and walked away.

They realised that she had been quite unable to overhear their low voices. But the attempt certainly meant that Study 12 was to be watched—spied upon, from now onwards.

All the more careful, therefore, were Betty's chums when, presently, they knew that the time had come for deeds, not words! When they knew

—as all the school knew, a notice to that effect having gone up on the green-baize board—that Betty Barton was to be in "deten" throughout the coming week!

There was an artfulness about the wording of that notice which took in scores of scholars. Betty's "offence" was specified, so that no suspicion of malice might arise. An exact statement as to how the punishment was to be administered also made it appear that humane conditions were being adopted.

But the chums, when they saw the notice, saw red. As soon as possible, they made their secret preparations. Many a stealthy journey to and from Study 12 and the clock tower was made early that evening. There was such a smuggling of eatables and crockery across to the clock tower as left the shelves of Study 12's corner cupboard quite bare.

All went well. Polly and Bunny were two who made the last trip of all, their final additions to the dump of stores being an oil cooker and some blanketing.

It was then late twilight—lock-up-time under the old regime. But they could come creeping back to the schoolhouse by sheltered pathways, knowing that lots of scholars were still out.

Whilst Betty—that great offender!—was languishing in the detention-room, at least twenty Morcové scholars were only now starting to walk home together from the Headland Hotel, where they had spent several joyous hours.

Such was the state of Morcové School, with the Dollonds in control!

PAM was coming away from the telephone-box, at the back of the hall, just as Polly and Bunny got indoors again.

"I've been ringing up Swanlake," she serenely

informed them. "And the car will be here for me—first thing in the morning."

"Good," said Polly. "Then altogether, girls, I reckon Study 12 is just about ready for—WAR!"

Monday Morning I

MADELEINE DOLLOND, presiding at the Form's breakfast-table in the great dining-room at Morcové School, took up a hand-bell to ring for silence.

"Now, girls, I merely want to say, when Betty Barton comes in to get her breakfast, you don't need to take any notice. Please say nothing to her. I am sure you know me well enough by now, to be quite certain that I do not wish to be harsh. But Betty Barton has given a great deal of trouble, and she must be brought to her senses!"

Here and there a girl received all this in doubtful silence; but the great majority, by their smiling murmurs, implied an "of course!" that must have been very gratifying to Miss Merrick's successor at the top of the table.

As for Polly and the rest of the ex-captain's chums—theirs was a stern silence now, whilst they gave one another secret nudges, or exchanged ankle-tappings under the table.

Betty was brought in, walking between Fay and Edna, who would sit on either side of her whilst she ate her breakfast. She would be starting it when the rest of the Form had nearly finished, and the coming "Dismiss!" would not apply to her.

Only at meal-times and in class would her schoolmates see her—poor Betty, whom Morcové were asked to regard as a scholar needing to be "brought to her senses!"

Her ever-loyal chums saw how she gave her eyes only to them; and had a bravely cheerful look themselves only!

The honeyed voice of Madeleine Dollond gave the "Dismiss!" and instantly there was a noisier surging away than there used to be. Formerly it had been a case of mere genuine high spirits; now girls were being quite hoydenish.

Letting others go first, Betty's chums passed together in the dining-room doorway to send a last look back to her, where she remained at table, with Fay and Edna on either side of her.

Then they rushed to the coat-room.

Hardly a schoolmate of theirs was on hand to see them hastily donning outdoor things. And it was the same when, a minute later, they were in the open air.

The habit of rushing out to the games field after breakfast was a thing of the past. Morcové in general, this term, preferred to slack about. Why not, when Authority itself had invited scholars to care so much less about games?

"Come on, then—to the clock tower now!"

That was Polly, speaking passionately to all the others, as if all were to be with her in that chosen place for the great bar-out.

But although there were nine of them who rushed away to the tower, there would be only five girls on the inside of that stout oak door when, presently, it had been banged shut and made fast.

Polly's companions were to be Bunny, Paula, Naomer and Tess. The rest had each a part to play, decided upon overnight.

So, next minute, many a parting word and also a parting handshake was being exchanged in front of the tower doorway. Breathless voices were speaking rapidly, whilst excited eyes glanced this way and that.

Brief Replies . . . To Correspondents

Ethne (Exeter).—A secret sign with the hands for our Secret Society is an excellent idea. I suggest hooking little fingers instead of shaking hands (to make an S), and as you part the hands put the tip of the first finger to the end of the thumb (to make an O).

Sylvia (Halifax).—One of the possible disadvantages of going to a boarding school, eh? I expect you'll be allowed to read SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN there, or otherwise order your newswagent to deliver them to your home regularly every week, then you'll have plenty of reading for the holidays!

Hilda (Leigh-on-Sea).—Paula's queer pronunciation has nothing to do with the part of England in which she was born, it is merely an inability to sound her "r's."

"Another Bunny."—Many thanks for a charming letter. I will certainly try to publish a serial story about the character you named, but I've been planning ahead, and find myself with a large number of really super-serials for immediate use in SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN.

Jean (Harlow, Essex).—Cherry is a scream, isn't she? I remember chuckling heartily over the story in which she blew the cornet outside the classroom. Well, you never know what she'll be up to next, do you?

Eileen (Hayward's Heath).—I always look forward to your regular letters, and here's a reply in the paper. Thanks for telling me who your six favourite film stars are. I'm writing to let you know who my favourite danceband leader is—but don't tell everybody, because—well, everyone may not agree!

"Judy—"

"Yes, Polly dear?"

"Here's my note, then, that you are to give one of the Dollonds—I don't mind which! That'll tell them!" Polly said fiercely, as the folded paper changed hands. "As soon as I give you the O.K., you can go back to the schoolhouse. Pam—"

"Oh, good-bye, Polly—all of you, good-bye and best of luck," said Pam. "I can see my car now—it has pulled up at the gateway, as I asked. You know, I reckon to keep in touch with you—shall slip over from Swanlake—"

"Oh, rather! Yours was a fine idea, Pam—" "Bekas, you can bring us heaps of zings to eat! And zat," cried Naomer, capering excitedly, "is everyzngk! So come on—queek, in with us now! Paula—"

"Pewfectly weady, yes, wather!" beamed the elegant member of the chummyry; and as she said it she stepped across the tower's threshold into the gloom beyond the doorway. "Bai Jove, geals, I twust things will impwove! When I am woused, I am—woused!"

"Zen what about me!" shrilled Naomer, diving in after Paula. "Coming, Bunny?"

"Yes! Oh—and so is Madeleine Dollond!" Polly, hearing this from Bunny, stayed not a moment longer talking with those who were to remain outside. A startled: "What!" and a quick glance in the direction indicated by Bunny, and then Polly herself was past the doorway.

Tess had entered first, a few seconds ago. All five were now inside, and there was a sudden cutting off of their excitable voices as the door closed with a terrific SLAM!

Of those who had stayed outside, Pam was the only one who did not remain to hear noises which told how swiftly the closed door was being wedged, bolted, and barricaded.

"I'm off, girls!" she serenely remarked, and began her run to the waiting car at the gateway.

Meantime, Madeleine Dollond had changed from a sharp walk to a brisk run—to the clock tower. That thunderous noise of a closing door and some muffled cheering from inside the tower had told her a good deal. More in anger than ignorance she demanded, as soon as she was within speaking distance of Judy, Madge and Helen:

"What's this!"

Judy was ready with that note. She advanced to offer it to the headmistress' infuriated daughter.

"This is for you and your mother."

Madeleine Dollond snatched at the folded paper; but, before there was time for her to open it; out, her angry eyes were attracted to one of the narrow windows half-way up the tower.

From that window a slender pole had suddenly been projected, wound about by flaglike material at its outer end.

Now, as some twisting of the pole caused the "flag" to unfurl, it was for Miss Dollond's staring eyes to see the Morcove coat of arms—copied as only clever Tess could copy the emblem.

Quickly and secretly, overnight, artistic Tess had performed this task—in readiness for to-day! Then Madeleine Dollond remembered that she had seen one of the Study 12 girls running fast to the gateway, just now. She looked in that direction.

"What is that girl doing? What is that car waiting for, over there?"

"Read the note," Judy advised calmly.

And she, with Madge and Helen, walked away, leaving the Dollond girl with eyes at last upon

what Polly had written, whilst from within the tower came the united voices of the strikers in one great:

"Hurrah-h-h!"

PAM had lost little breath and still less of her habitual serenity when she got to the car, with her parents' head chauffeur holding the door open for her.

"Morning, Jeffreys!"

"Morning, miss!" he saluted.

"I want you first to drive to the Cottage Hospital, so that I can inquire how Miss Merrick is this morning."

"Very good, miss."

"Then you will take me home to Swanlake. I may be at home for a few days, Jeffreys; it all depends. Suppose I need it—I can have the car as much as I like?"

"Certainly, miss! With the master and mistress away. Excuse my asking, but—there is some trouble on at the school?"

"A lot of trouble, Jeffreys."

"Then I hope, miss, you and any friends of yours will come off best."

"Thank you, Jeffreys. I rather think we shall!"

The chauffeur saluted again, closed the door gently, and got to his seat at the wheel.

Very quietly the fine car glided away; so quietly that Pam distinctly heard, even at this distance, another ringing cheer from the strikers in the tower—and another after that.

"Hurrah!" and again: "Hurrah-h-h!"

Their spirited cheering equivalent to a fearless proclamation to the whole school:

"No surrender! No surrender—until Betty has been freed!"

[END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.]

Matters are serious indeed when Betty Barton and Co.—for the first time in their lives—are reluctantly compelled to admit that they are

"ASHAMED OF THEIR SCHOOL"

Be sure to read this magnificent long complete story in next Tuesday's

SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN