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The RIVALS of MORCOVE



Home for the holidays—and still the mystery of the mill shadows Ethel Courtway and her boy-pal, Cyril Dudley.

By Marjorie Stanton

An Ultimatum.

HAD it been possible Ethel would have retreated; not for her own sake, but for Cyril's. What sort of reception would Maxwell Dyke extend when he discovered that Cyril was amongst the visitors? Bunched together, the carol-singing party presented merely a vague collection of indistinct faces to Dyke. Ethel saw his handsome features fixed in the conventional polite smile of welcome as he ushered them into the hall; saw him draw back to make way for the tall, middle-aged gentleman—Major Dyke evidently—who advanced to meet the visitors; saw Maxwell suddenly fix his eyes on Cyril, and then give a perceptible start.

For the moment Maxwell Dyke appeared not to trust the evidence of his eyesight. As the conviction penetrated that it was Cyril, his mouth set aggressively, and he strode forward.

Ethel, who had missed nothing of this, quietly stepped into the line of advance.

"How do you do?" she said quietly. Dyke found himself gazing into what he considered were the finest pair of eyes in the school. "Ethel Courtway!" he mentally ejaculated, as he stopped short in startled embarrassment.

The sight of Ethel for the moment banished all thoughts of Cyril Dudley, and what he was going to do to Cyril. Dyke's one thought was that it was splendid having Ethel under his father's roof.

"I say, this is jolly!" he murmured. "I'd no idea you lived in these parts."

"I don't; I'm spending Christmas at my aunt's—Miss Courtway."

"Miss Courtway your aunt! Now, how curious I should never have associated you with her! Of course, I know Miss Susan Courtway. Your aunt rules us with a rod of iron, but we cheerfully obey her. Father, one minute, please!"

Major Dyke turned at the sound of his son's voice.

"This is Miss Courtney's niece Ethel," said Maxwell. "She is also the head girl of Morcove School, so you see we are quite old friends."

A better man than the son, Ethel instantly decided, as she shook hands with Major Dyke. A fine, upright man, gentleman written all over him, kindly, simple-mannered, with whom it was impossible to feel anything but at ease.

She chatted with him for some minutes, and Maxwell all the while stood by, with the frown once more in evidence on his face. Swift to note little things, he contrasted Ethel's manner when she was pleased and when she was indifferent. Speaking to his father, her voice held a tone that was never there when she was with him.

"It's the same when she is talking to that chap Dudley!" fumed Maxwell. "Just the

same! I'm just nothing! Confound him! I wish now I'd greeted him as I intended to do—told him to make himself at home with the servants, bread-and-cheese and pickles down in the pantry. I may do it yet, too!"

His thoughts trailed away in a glowing picture of the sensation such an act would cause. Out of the tail of his eye he caught sight of Cyril talking to Percy Dumpsey and Gordon Pellow, two of the gilded youths of Winchmore's highest society. These gentlemen in question would have fourteen separate fits if he were to go up and tell them Cyril's position at Prior's.

He could imagine them bleating in horrified accents: "A common servant! Good gracious!"

Mrs. Tullibody, too, the stout lady sitting near by—what a thorn for her gossiping tongue! There were others as well. Oh, yes, he could make it precious uncomfortable for Cyril—also Ethel—if he liked!

His father hearing Ethel at this moment, Maxwell sprang to her side.

"I can see the gov'nor's taken to you," he said.

"I should think your father is kind to most people," replied Ethel.

"True! He's one of the best!" To do him justice, Maxwell Dyke was perfectly sincere in this. "I hope you'll be at home when he and I pay our Christmas morning visit to your aunt."

"I dare say," said Ethel. "I understand, by the way, that Maurice Thorne is with you for Christmas. Ah, yes, I see him over there!"

Yes, there was Maurice Thorne, with his small, beady eyes, and his sinister presence. As usual, he lope in the background, acting the part of onlooker, yet Ethel was convinced—quietly pulling the strings and, in reality, at the bottom of all the mischief.

"Yes, I invited the chap here. Prior's,"

THE CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY ARE:

ETHEL COURTWAY, head girl of Morcove School, and

CYRIL DUDLEY, her boy friend, who was at one time confidential secretary to Ethel's father. He was dismissed for some unknown reason, in disgrace, and in order to clear his name comes down to Morcove near Ethel, and takes employment at Prior's boys' school, where he incurs the enmity of

MAXWELL DYKE, the head boy, and his friend

MAURICE THORNE, who slightly resembles Cyril in build. After many exciting adventures at the old mill, Ethel and Cyril go on to

Winchmore to see Maurice Thorne with Ethel's aunt. Singing cards will come by chance to the home of Maxwell Dyke.

He invites them in.

(How read on.)

added Maxwell, with a meaning look in Cyril's direction, "is quite well represented this evening."

Ethel nodded, and, with a polite little smile, made as if to move off and join her party.

Maxwell was seized with a sudden spasm of fury. She did not want to be with him, didn't she? Ah, and there was Maurice Thorne, with his beaming grin, watching them—gloating, likely enough, over his discomfiture! Others watching, over his discomfiture! Others watching, over his discomfiture! That Ethel—and he made a very handsome pair, and therefore were observed by all around.

"One minute, Ethel," he said, placing a detaining hand lightly on her arm. "There is one representative of my school here to-night"—he lowered his tone confidentially—"one representative that I confess has placed me in a bit of a fix. He came in with your party, but it's rather difficult to express things without interrupting Ethel."

"I quite understand," interrupted Ethel.

"You understand! What exactly do you understand?"

"Your difficulty," said Ethel.

Maxwell turned a trifle red, but, keeping his temper in check, he continued:

"Your friend's position at Prior's is to fetch and carry, run errands, call the fellows 'sit,' and generally do what everyone here would term servant's work. He appears to be a great friend of yours, but this is so unthinkably to me that from time to time it has occurred that perhaps he has frightened you into his friendship."

"Look here, Ethel," he continued, "if this is so—if you go in fear of him—you have only to give me the slightest hint, and I'd rattle him even if he were a world's boxing champion. In the ordinary way, I'll own up frankly that I haven't much use for girls. Pre-arranged it would have been different if I had sisters. For instance, sisters like you. You see—"

"I do not go in fear of him," cut in Ethel, abruptly bringing him back to the point.

Some attraction at the other end of the room had drawn everyone thither, and thus it happened that the two were practically by themselves.

Maxwell thrust his hands in his pockets.

"If I had introduced your friend, and my father had asked me what he was"—there was a threat in every note of his voice—"how would you have had me answer him? Come now, Ethel! Should I have glossed over the servant business, or—told the truth?"

"It's no business of mine to solve your problems," retorted Ethel.

Maxwell glanced about him for a second or so, pondering.

"If you see that painting hanging over there?" he asked suddenly.

Ethel, in some surprise, glanced in the direction indicated. She saw an old oil-

painting in a massive, gilt frame. In it was a portrait of a dark man, dressed in the period of Charles the First.

"Yes," she said, "I see it. What has he to do with it?"
 "That is a portrait of Sir Wilfred Dyke," returned Maxwell. "Some say he and I are alike. Not extraordinary when you consider that I am a descendant of his. Well, he had the reputation of being a good friend but a bad foe. Maybe I inherit this little characteristic. Understand."

Ethel's gaze never faltered.
 "Do you know," she said, "it's a tribute unfortunate, from your point of view, that you showed me this picture of your cavalier ancestor?"

"And why?"
 "Because," continued Ethel evenly, "it reminds me of a certain Ethel evenly, 'it' reminds me of a certain Ethel evenly that at a fancy dress dance a few nights back. I hope he didn't get very wet going to the landslip, or that his headmaster was very cross with him."

"Oh!" breathed Maxwell Dyke, in deep confusion, for all along he had prided himself that whatever other misfortune had happened on that fatal night of Prior's dance, Ethel, at least, had no notion of his mean action.

Her words, however, showed only too plainly that he was found out.

Much as she disliked the fellow, Ethel's heart smote her as she gazed at his crimson face.

"It was not playing the game," she said gently. "Own now, you were a bit ashamed of yourself afterwards. Such an action didn't come natural to you. You're not really that sort."

"I'm his sort!" muttered Maxwell passionately; he pointed to the picture. "What I did the other evening—oh, yes, I own up to it!—wasn't aimed at you, but at that fellow Dudley. Well, I failed, but I mean always fail. What does your aunt, the leader of Winchmore, think of it all? But perhaps she doesn't know Master Dudley's inner history. There crept into his young man's triumphant note as he saw Ethel's expression change. He took her look to mean fear, whereas it was only disgust that he should continue acting in this way after she had generously given him a loophole to extricate himself.

"I see," he went on, "no one but you, I and Thorne knows the inner history. Shall I go up to Dudley now and, in the hearing of all, say: 'Excuse me, but aren't you the fellow who cleans the boots at school?' Shall I do that?"

"There's nothing to prevent you," returned Ethel, white-faced.

"I fancy there is," muttered Maxwell. "A slightly more pleasant greeting from you when we meet during these holidays might prevent me. The use now and then of my Christian name. Don't you understand what these things mean to me?"

"No," said Ethel flatly. "I think you must be mad. What would be the use of all that to you when you'd know all along I wasn't sincere?"

"But you might get sincere—after a time," "I'm positive I shouldn't."

Dyke nodded as if he had been hit.

"I see," he muttered, and began to move in the direction of the group gathered round his father. He walked slowly, hoping that Ethel might give way at the last moment, and also to give himself time to nerve himself up to do the thing he contemplated.

Deep down in his heart he hated himself—he hated himself almost as much as he hated his rival. There was also the conviction that he had been "very young" in his manner of handling the situation. He prided himself that he was grown up, and yet there was the uncomfortable realisation that his behaviour had been boyish in the extreme.

He had attempted to bully and browbeat—the last thing likely to win the affection of a girl of Ethel Courway's high spirit. He had acted like an ignorant yokel—he, who had prided himself he was an aristocrat.

Maxwell gave one final glance at Ethel to see if there were any signs of surrender.

None!
 At that moment his father approached him.

"Now then, you two!" cried Major Dyke. "I want your support for a suggestion I've just been making. I propose, Max, that our house-party challenges Miss Susan Courway's house-party to a mixed hockey-match on Boxing Day afternoon. What d'you say?"

"Capital notion, father," returned the son, licking his dry lips.

"And you, Miss Ethel—are you agreeable?"
 "Perfectly," said Ethel, making a brave effort to smile.

"Good!" beamed the major. "Then, weather permitting, we will all turn up here at two-thirty sharp the day after to-morrow."

Maxwell strode up to Ethel directly his father had withdrawn.

"Look here!" he muttered huskily. "I'll leave things as they are until Monday afternoon. If your friends turns out to play—"

A significant pause; then, "Well, you've nearly forty-eight hours to think it over."

Without deigning to answer, Ethel passed along, leaving Maxwell Dyke standing beneath the picture of his ancestor.

The expression on both the living and the painted face seemed to follow her with malevolent intent.

An Hour on the Ice.

It turned out a real "Christmas Cardy" Christmas Day, with a great deal of frost and just sufficient snow to make things pretty.

"If your friend turns out to play—"
 said Maxwell Dyke. A significant pause, then: "Well, you've forty-eight hours to think it over!" Without deigning to answer, Ethel walked away.

Major Dyke and his guests think doesn't really matter at all."

"As a matter of fact," said Cyril, brightening up at the thought, "I can't possibly get out of playing. What excuse could I offer here? None at all, except telling them all the facts. No, Ethel, the crisis has jolly well come, and it's got to be faced."

"Yes, yes," cried Ethel eagerly, "and I'll face it with you, Cyril!"

Whereat Cyril spent the next half-hour at the window, waiting to catch a view of Major Dyke and Maxwell coming along to pay their promised Christmas morning call on Aunt Susan.

"Ah," breathed Cyril presently, "the cad's avoided it! The major's come by himself!"

But if Cyril were disappointed, his feelings were not shared by Ethel. With the dreaded visit over and done with, and the fact that at last they were coming to grips with Cyril's enemies, Ethel began to feel decidedly more in tune with the jollity of her cousins. Of course, to-morrow afternoon had to be faced, but—well, sufficient for the day was the evil thereof.

News arrived soon after dinner that the ice on the "leg of mutton pond" down by the woods was now "holding." Immediately the subject of the whereabouts of skates bo came the topic of the hour.

At first Aunt Susan would not hear of it.



This appropriate setting, together with the merry company gathered under Aunt Susan's roof would in the ordinary way have caused no room for anything but extreme happiness in Ethel's heart. But last night's interview with Maxwell Dyke cast its black shadow over everything, and entirely spoilt her enjoyment.

Of course, she informed Cyril of what had happened.

"The chap's a thorough cad and outsider!" declared Cyril angrily. "A coward, too. He apparently doesn't dare to tackle me personally, but tries to get at me through you. Hateful fellow! Oh, if I could only get him by himself! But he's too artful for that."

This and much more Cyril said. He was like a strong man tied to a post whilst his enemy mocked him. To avoid a public scandal, for Ethel's sake, there seemed nothing for it but to put up with things.

"You saw Thorne?" asked Ethel.

Cyril nodded.

"I suppose I'd better not play in the hockey-match," he fumed.

"That would be abject surrender!" cried Ethel despairingly. "Cyril, as far as I am concerned, I am quite willing to put up with the consequences. Let Maxwell tell his story. No one under my aunt's roof will think any the worse of you for what you've done. What

She raked in her memory, and dug up all the ice accidents that had occurred at Winchmore Down for the past thirty years.

"The ice must be thoroughly tested," she declared, "before any of you go on."

"I go thirteen stone," said Tom Holliday, the sailor cousin, "and I hereby volunteer to walk over to the pond and do a step-dance across to the middle and back."

"I'll join you!" cried Cyril eagerly.

"And I, too!" chimed in Ethel and her cousins Mabel, Dorothy, and Marjorie.

"No," said Aunt Susan, holding up her hand authoritatively. "The young men I cannot control, but the girls—yes. It is Tom's profession to risk his life, and therefore the more risks he takes the better, I suppose, he gets on in the Navy. I do not profess to understand these things."

"Quite so!" laughed the sailor, and, as befits a man of action, he immediately rose from his seat and sallied forth, accompanied by Cyril.

Ethel and the others occupied the interval of waiting by routing out the skates on the off-chance that the report as to the state of the ice would be favourable. Presently the cheery cry of "All right; carry on!" echoed from the hall, and immediately a wild race ensued as to who should get to the ice first.



(Continued from previous page.)

As far as the donning of coats was concerned, it was a neck-and-neck affair between Ethel and Marjorie; but once they were outside, and it was a question of running, Marjorie's head girl easily took the lead, and arrived at the pond fully three minutes before her cousin.

Cyril and Tom were already on the ice, cutting elaborate figures and otherwise displaying their prowess as skaters.

Then Ethel joined them, and at once challenged Cyril to a race.

"Avoid the far corner by the wood!" called out Tom Holliday. "It's a sheltered spot, so isn't over safe."

"Right-ho!" they shouted, and were off like the wind.

A pale moon had obligingly come out to light the scene, and they had a perfect view of everything, except where the trees of the pond cast their deep shadows.

It was a beautifully level stretch of ice, and Ethel gave Cyril a good run for his money. On and on they flew until the nearness of the opposite bank necessitated Ethel swerving in a semi-circle to avoid a collision.

Cyril was very close to her now, and they started the return journey with about a couple of yards between them. Half-way home she heard Cyril's triumphant cry of "Caught you—"

The remainder of the sentence was lost in a medley of hoarse shouts that echoed with startling suddenness from the portion of the ice they had just left. It rang out sharply and distinct in the keen, frosty air, and with it now mingled a sound of cracking, like the distant spluttering of rifle-fire.

Ethel and Cyril's skates cut into the ice as they wheeled round.

"My word!" ejaculated Cyril. "Someone's just come on the ice, and it's giving way!"

Again that despairing cry; again the ominous cracking.

With scarcely a thought of the danger, Ethel and Cyril skated back. Who could have met with this mishap, they wondered? Certainly none of their party.



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Ah, they could now see that the uniform whiteness of the ice was broken by a jagged streak of black, twenty yards ahead.

"All right!" shouted Cyril. "Help's coming! Crack, crack! from the ice was the only reply. Down went Cyril on all fours, and started to crawl towards the cavity.

"Go back, Ethel, and see if Tom is coming," he muttered.

"He's coming; I can hear him," said Ethel. She shot a swift glance over her shoulder and continued to follow close behind Cyril.

"I'm lighter than you, let me go first," she said.

"No, no, keep where you are! Get ready to catch hold of my ankle. I'm close to the edge now!"

Ethel peered ahead, and suddenly she saw Cyril's arm shoot out to its fullest extent, and his whole body went taut as a rope does when attached to some falling weight.

"Pull, Ethel—pull your hardest!" gasped Cyril. "I've got him!"

A cry behind them of "I'm coming!" cut into the still air, and Ethel heard someone approaching over the ice as she gripped hold of Cyril's ankles.

"Tom!" she thought, and then: "Suppose his extra weight—"

"Pull—pull!" Cyril kept on shouting.

A second or so later—it seemed an age to Ethel—the bulky form of Tom Holliday beat across her, and his muscular hands gripped Cyril's ankles as well. Cautiously his hands slipped up to Cyril's waist.

"Now," he grunted, "one heave!"

Small particles of the ice near the jagged edge cracked, and for a moment it seemed certain that the whole surface would give way. A period of sickening anxiety got away. Then slowly, Tom, Ethel and Cyril backed away from the danger zone, dragging with them the sodden, limp form of a man.

"Keep on!" breathed Tom. "Another foot or so!" Halt!

The sailor crept round until he was bending over the rescued man's face.

"We must get him to the house," Ethel heard him mutter.

By this time the rest of the skating-party had gathered near, and were asking if they should come and help.

"Not for the moment," called out the sailor. "Some of you run back and tell Aunt Susan what has happened. She'll know what preparations to make. Now, Cyril, off with your skates, and we'll carry him ashore."

Quickly this was done, and with Cyril and Ethel's help the unconscious man was slowly carried to safety. Then they all set to, and started on artificial respiration.

They had only been working for a few seconds when they heard Ethel give vent to a slight ejaculation.

"Eh?" said Tom Holliday inquiringly.

"Nothing," muttered Ethel. Once more she peered into the man's face. Surely it could not be! It was impossible, and yet—the extraordinary likeness!

It was—her father!

The Faces in the Crowd.

YES, her father! Amazing! Momentarily deprived of breath by this extraordinary fact, Ethel glanced at Cyril, wondering whether he also had made the same discovery.

Their eyes met for an instant, and something in his look told her that he had. His silence, however, had the effect of checking any exclamation on her part.

They must be cautious! Tom Holliday, good fellow as he undoubtedly was, had better be kept in the dark for the present. Her cousins, too.

A gasp came from the prostrate Mr. Courtway.

"Good!" exclaimed Holliday. "We've done the trick. Now I wonder if those who went up to the house will think to bring back some sort of stretcher? Cyril lad, hop off and see!"

Cyril rose to his feet and hastened away, with Ethel hard on his heels.

"Cyril!" she whispered, clutching his arm. "Phew!" he whistled. "Not that arm, Ethel! It's strained or something of the sort. Your father's no light freight to hang on to."

"Is it father? You're sure, too?"

"Oh, yes, it's him, right enough. Queer business, Ethel, and because it is such a queer business, like you, I shall hold my tongue."

"Is—is he seriously hurt, do you think, Cyril?" asked Ethel, with a catch in her voice.

"Hope not. But an icy bath like that won't do him any good at this time of life. Poor old chap! I'm glad it was you and I who lugged him out."

"I! Little I did!"

Cyril did not contest the point.

"I wonder what Aunt Susan will say?" he questioned, with a frown of perplexity.

"What on earth was he doing here?"

At this point they came on the party returning from the house. They had had the gumption to think of a stretcher.

"I'll go back with them and help carry him," whispered Cyril. "You go and prepare Aunt Susan."

The preparation of Aunt Susan, fortunately, was not a very difficult matter. Miss Courtway was not the woman to faint or wring her hands, or become incompetent in the hour of crisis. The only emotion she betrayed was a slightly nervous movement of the hands as she listened to what Ethel had to tell her.

"I've telephoned the doctor," said her aunt. "Also hot-water bottles are prepared and the bed warmed."

"Isn't it awful, aunt?" cried Ethel. "He might have been drowned if Cyril hadn't been there to pull him out."

Her aunt nodded.

"Just shows that he never should have got rid of Cyril," she observed tartly.

To a stranger this remark would have sounded a trifle unfeeling, considering the deadly peril her brother had been in; but Ethel, knowing Aunt Susan better, was well aware that it was only her way of disguising her true feelings.

"I think it would be well to keep his identity a secret for the moment," said Ethel.

"Good gracious, child, I know that! Your father never liked his affairs being talked about."

In silence they waited under the portico, and presently the little procession bearing Mr. Courtway came into view.

Aunt Susan ran down the steps.

"Is he bad?" Ethel heard her ask.

"He hasn't spoken yet," replied Holliday.

"The shock's probably numbed his brain. To which room do we take him?"

"My room. Ah, here comes Dr. Bramcomb. Be exceedingly prompt, I must say."

Rapidly the centre of interest shifted to the first floor of the house, and remained there for the worst quarter of an hour Ethel had ever spent. What a hollow mockery seemed the Christmas decorations and the other signs of Yuletide festivity!

Worse still, there was no one in whom she could confide her frightful anxiety, in view of the fact that no one down here was aware that the half-drowned man was her own father. Cyril was upstairs with her aunt, helping.

Her cousin pressed about her, wanting to be told the fullest details of the affair. How were they to know how it tortured her to speak about it?

Tom Holliday, however, guessed something was wrong.

"Shoo!" he cried, dispersing them in a playful way. "Ethel wants to be quiet after all she's been through. No wonder! To-morrow you can tell her how splendid she's been. Run and tell Ethel, and put on another pretty frock. That'll take your mind off broken ice and disasters."

Ethel could have hugged him.

She slipped out into the hall; then stopped and listened.

Faint sounds came from the floor above.

What did they portend? Surely the doctor was a very long time up there! A good sign

or a bad one? She tiptoed to the staircase, halted, straining her ears all the while.

Murmurs—nothing but murmurs.

From the kitchen echoed the shrill laugh of one of the maids. Ethel flushed with anger. How dare anyone laugh at such a moment!

Up the stairs she went, pausing on every step, until she reached the landing. A thin streak of light from the far end caught her eye. That was the room. In there it was all happening. This Dr. Bramscoble looked rather an anxious man, but he was clever? A specialist ought to be telegraphed for!

"Hush, a chair was creaking! Someone was moving! Oh, why didn't Cyril come and give her news? Why didn't he? He must know what suspense she was undergoing.

Then the bedroom door softly opened. Someone coming out—Cyril!

Ethel darted to him.

"Tell me!" she breathed.

"The doctor's quite hopeful," he said. "He'll pull through all right."

Ethel shook like a leaf with the reaction, and, just as he used to do when they were kiddies together and Ethel brought her small tragedies to him, he put his arm round her waist, soothingly and protectively.

"You know, it might have been a jolly sight worse," he said.

"But you were such a time up there."

"Yes. You see, the doctor insisted on examining my arm. I've sprained a ligament. No hockey for me to-morrow, worse luck!"

Ethel, for the first time, noticed that his right arm was in a sling.

"Oh, Cyril!" she cried. "What a pity!"

"You're right—can't be helped, though. I say, Ethel! Your father recognised me."

"He did! What did he say?"

"Nothing. He isn't allowed to talk. I bet he's thinking, though."

"I must go in and see him," cried Ethel, suddenly conscience-stricken that the idea had not occurred before.

"Humph! He's got to be kept quiet. Still, you can try."

Ethel "tried," and was firmly repulsed both by the doctor and her aunt.

"Not until to-morrow," she was told, and consequently she had to possess her soul with patience for a nerve-racking period of twelve weary hours.

"Now, listen, Ethel," said Aunt Susan, at the end of this time—breakfast was just over.

"You are only just to say 'Good-morning' to your father, and then retire. He's better—I'm sure of that, because he distinctly snapped at me when I hunched up his pillow. But he's very weak. I give you one minute, not a second longer."

Her father seemed to be dozing when she glided noiselessly into the room and walked to his bedside. As she bent over him, though, he opened his eyes.

"Hs, Ethel!" he murmured. "First illness, never had."

"Yes, yes, father, but you'll soon get well. What is that you say? Not tell serious who you are? Of course not. No one knows—no one shall know. It's just our secret."

"Very important," he mumbled, closing his eyes.

Ethel kissed him and softly withdrew.

Was this only the caprice of a sick sneeze, she wondered, or was it to be taken seriously? She went over the various arguments in her mind, and presently submitted them to Cyril.

"It's obvious," she said, "that father meant his visit here to be a secret one. Doesn't it suggest that he was being followed—probably by those men I saw down in those secret vaults at the landslip?"

"That's it," muttered Cyril.

"So, naturally, he doesn't want his presence here known."

"It'll be difficult to keep it a secret," said Cyril. "If those who followed him hear of last night's accident—and they're pretty certain to hear—they'll naturally jump to the conclusion that it's your father."

"Well, what's to be done?" asked Ethel blankly.

"Keep a sharp look-out for strangers. Either my wretched left arm getting hurt! The very time I most want to use it, too! I say, Ethel, has it occurred to you that Dyke may think this sling is a fake? I mean, he'll think

that I've pretended to hurt my arm just to avoid trouble at the hockey-match this afternoon."

Ethel opened her eyes at this. It had not occurred to her.

"He's certain to think we've caved in to his threats," said Cyril.

"But you can easily prove that your arm is hurt. We can all bear witness to that, and— Ah, I see the difficulty! That'll mean telling all about father's accident—the very thing we don't want to discuss. Oh, Cyril, we do seem to have wretched luck!"

"The attitude they expected Maxwell Dyke to take up turned out to be the one he adopted."

Maxwell and his father met the Courtney hockey team at the gates of the former's home, and Maxwell's eyes glistened as he saw Cyril's arm reposing in a sling.

Then he greeted Ethel with a triumphant smile, as if to say: "That's the way you've got over the difficulty, is it?"

"Hallo!" cried the major to Cyril. "What have you been up to, young fellow? Qualifying for a wound stripe?"

"I've strained the muscle of my arm, sir," replied Cyril. "It's an awful swindle. I can't play to-day."

"As he said this he glared at Maxwell.

"Very hard lines," agreed Maxwell

what position are you occupying this afternoon?"

"Centre-forward," said Ethel.

"Centre-half, me!" returned Thorne. "That means we're likely to see a good deal of each other during the next hour. How jolly! Mind you don't go knocking me about. I'm delicate, I am! Ha, ha!"

Thorne clearly considered Ethel hadn't a ghost of a chance against him. He had not played much hockey—footer was his game—but still, he reckoned his size, strength, and speed would leave her practically a passenger in the coming contest.

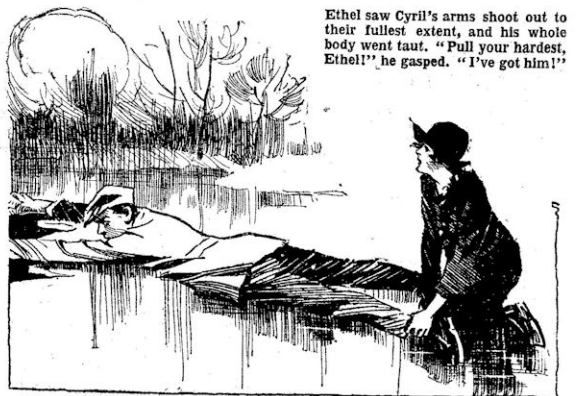
"Ha, quite a fair-sized 'gate!' he observed, when they reached the ground and saw quite a hundred people assembled along the touchlines.

As a matter of fact, the news of the game had spread over Winchmore Down, and, as the event seemed to promise some good sport, they had trooped over to see.

As Ethel and Cyril passed by a group of people that had gathered by one of the goals, a voice struck her ears—a man's voice, a trifle uncultured, and decidedly on the loud side.

Ethel stopped suddenly. The voice roused a memory, and Ethel turned to see who the speaker was.

A broad back view of a man wearing a



Ethel saw Cyril's arms shoot out to their fullest extent, and his whole body went taut. "Pull your hardest, Ethel!" he gasped. "I've got him!"

politely. "I quite understand how you feel. That makes your side one short, I suppose, Ethel, unless you've raked in one of the servants to play."

"No," said Ethel, passing over the gibe. "We're eight all told."

"Then we will only play eight," declared Major Dyke sportingly. "I'll stand down."

"No, no, major!" protested everyone.

"You must play!"

But the major was firm on the point. In twos and threes they trooped over to the hockey-ground—a large field at the rear of the Dyke estate. Cyril walked by Ethel's side, to save the possibility of Maxwell foisting his unpleasant company on her. Maxwell kept away, however, and it was Maurice Thorne who approached them.

"Hard lines, old bean!" he said to Cyril, with pretended sympathy. "Beastly luck to lose the use of one of your hands at Christmas time. Got to have your food cut up—what? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Did you returned Cyril shortly.

"Did you fall downstairs?" asked Thorne.

"No."

"Tackled a burglar, perhaps?" suggested Thorne. "Heaps of burglars about at Christmas. Isn't that so, Miss Ethel?"

"There are objectionable people about at all times," said Ethel.

Thorne gave vent to a fatuous chuckle.

"I believe you," he gurgled. "I say,

well-cut coat and a light trilby hat caught her eye. He was apparently with a couple of friends, and the trio were holding forth to the villagers with many jests and anecdotes.

"I've heard that voice before," Ethel told herself. "I know I have! Where? I wish I could remember."

She passed on to the small box where the players were to leave their coats and wraps. Just as she was about to enter she stopped short.

"I know now!" she muttered. "I heard that voice down in the vaults beneath the landslip. One of those three men—father's enemies, the men who are after his secret!"

And now her father's enemies were at Winchmore Down. For what purpose—for what dark purpose?

Well might Ethel ask herself: What is the significance of the visit of her father's enemies to Winchmore Down? There are other questions, too, that would puzzle her to answer: What was the object of her father's visit, and how came he to fall through the ice? Was it the result of foul play, or just an accident? You will learn more of the mystery, and the exciting events it is responsible for, in next week's moving chapters of this story.