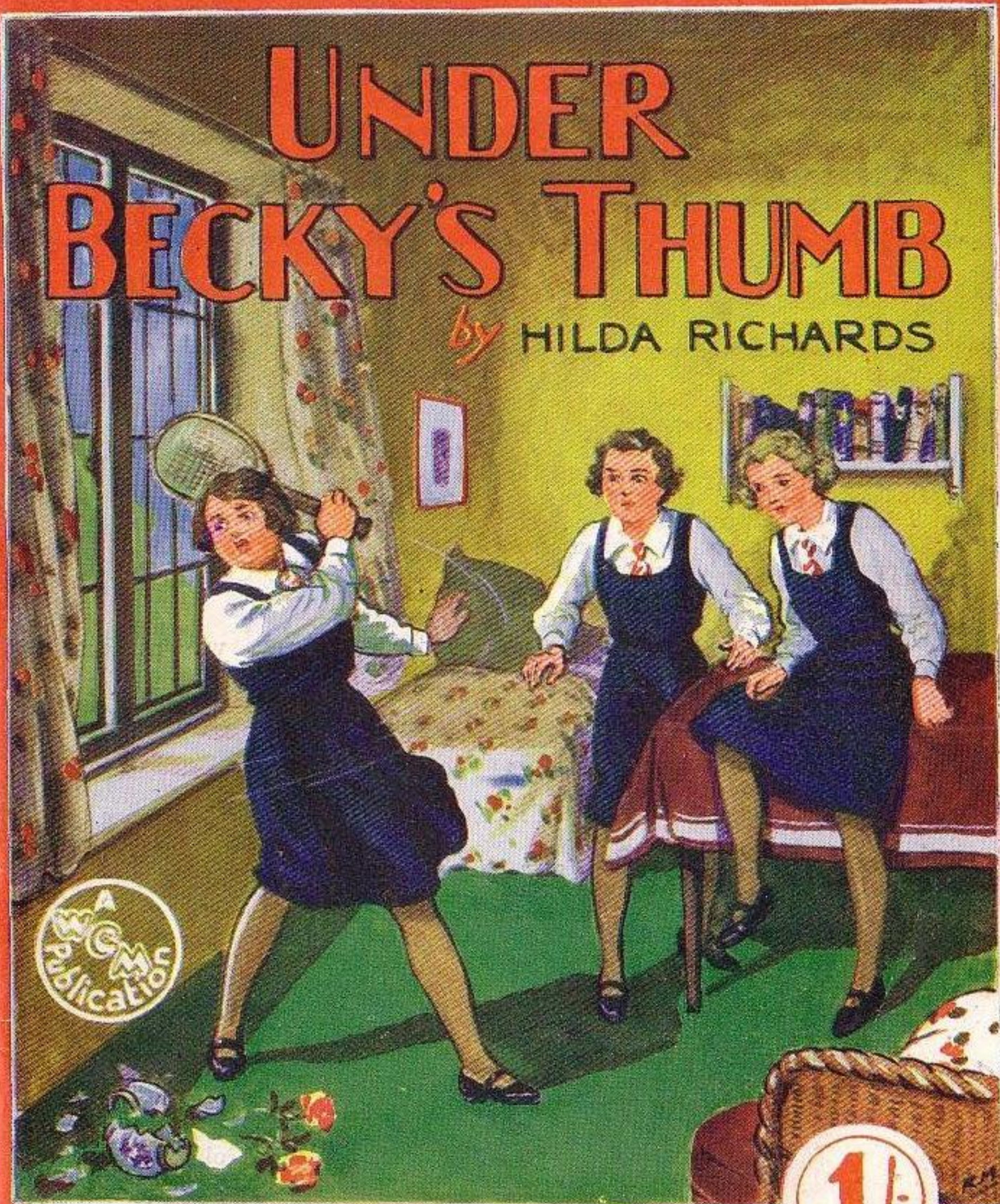


HEADLAND HOUSE SERIES N°2

UNDER BECKY'S THUMB

by HILDA RICHARDS



DOLLY'S MASTER STROKE

1/-

UNDER BECKY'S THUMB!

By Hilda Richards.

CHAPTER THE FIRST.

THE GUARDIAN ANGEL!

"MARGARET dear—"

Becky Bunce, of the Lower Fifth at Headland House School, spoke in honeyed tones, as she put a bullet head in to No. 8 Study.

Three girls in that study smiled. Or, to be more exact, Meg Ridd and Ethel Bent smiled while Dolly Brace grinned. Dolly, had a large plump face, and when she was amused it was overspread by a large plump grin.

"So sorry!" said Margaret, gently.

"Sorry?" repeated Becky Bunce.

"Yes! I haven't any."

"Same here!" remarked Ethel Bent.

"Likewise and ditto!" said Dolly Brace, "Nothing doing! You've struck a bad patch, Becky. Shut the door after you."

Becky stared at them with surprised greenish eyes.

"I know you two haven't any," she said, "But Margaret has."

"No, really!" asserted Margaret.

"Try next door!" suggested Dolly Brace, "Corisande Cholmendeley has lots and lots and lots."

"Lots and lots of what?" ejaculated Becky.

"Cash—spondulics—dough—tin—chink—," Dolly Brace was rather given to slang, in spite of the efforts of her form-mistress, Miss Gadsby, to eradicate that little failing in her plumpest pupil.

"If you think I've come here to borrow money—!" squeaked Becky Bunce, indignantly.

"Eh! Haven't you?"

"No!" sniffed Becky.

"Then why," exclaimed Dolly Brace, "did you call Meg 'Margaret dear'?"

Becky glared. But really, it was quite a natural inference. Becky's was not an affectionate nature. She seldom deared or darlined anybody. Only, in fact, when she wanted something. And what Rebecca Bunce generally wanted was a little loan,—anything from sixpence to half-a-crown.

No. 8 Study, it seemed, had misunderstood. For once Becky had "deared" in honeyed tones without wanting a loan. But No. 8 Study were not to blame. They could not have been expected to guess that one!

"I want 'Margaret to lend me her camera!" said Becky, with dignity, "I suppose a girl can borrow a camera. I haven't one, and it's very important. Margaret dear, will you lend me your camera?"

"'Dear' is to be construed 'camera', not 'cash'!" said Dolly Brace, imitating the staccato tones of Miss Gadsby giving instruction in translation.

Margaret Ridd hesitated.

She was a good-natured girl—perhaps too good-natured. She found it difficult to say 'No,' to anyone. But there was a limit. Becky was an incessant borrower, but she was not careful with borrowed goods. She had been known to light a study fire with a borrowed book. She had already borrowed that very camera once, and left it on a seat in the School Field—and a night out in the rain hadn't done that camera any good. There was a pause.

"No!" said Dolly Brace, speaking for her friend, "Ask Edith Race. She's got a jolly good camera."

"You know I can't ask a Sixth-form prefect!" snapped Becky, "Margaret dear—"

"No!" repeated Dolly, "Not even if you make it Margaret darling. Not even if you make it Margaret love! And there's a draught with that door open."

"I—I think—!" said Margaret.

"No, you don't!" interrupted Dolly, "You can leave the thinking to me in this case. Your camera isn't going to be left out in the rain again."

"It's fine weather now!" said Meg, mildly.

"Becky might leave it out of gates next time," said Dolly, "On the cliffs, or in the middle of Oke Wood. You know Becky, and her jolly old manners and customs. Hook it, Becky."

But Becky did not "hook" it, as the slangy Dolly urged. She had come to No. 8 Study for Margaret Ridd's camera, and she was not going without that camera, if she could help it.

"Of course, I'll take great care of it, Margaret dear!" she said, "I say, there's a prize photographic competition in the Rodwood and Oke Gazette. A guinea for the best local picture. I want that guinea."

"Do they give the prize for the smariest smudge?" asked Dolly.

"No they don't!" howled Becky.

"Then you may as well stand out of it. You can't photograph, you can't develop, you can't print, and any of your snaps might be anything from a view of Vesuvius in eruption to a study in Highland mists. So wash it out."

"Taint your camera!" snapped Becky, "You'll lend it to me, won't you, Meg? You're not mean with your things like Dolly Brace."

"Well, will you take care of it this time?" asked Margaret, "If anything happens to it, I can't get another."

"Of course I will, and I'll pay for the films in it, of course," said Becky.

"Cash down?" asked Dolly sceptically.

"Next week—!"

"Or next term, or the term after!" said Dolly, "We know! Meg, don't be a goat. Becky it's time to travel!"

"So I can have it, dear?" asked Becky, passing Dolly Brace by like the idle wind which she regarded not, "Thanks! Where is it?"

"On the shelf," said Margaret.

Becky looked round for the shelf. Dolly Brace, with a determined expression on her plump face, bounced off her chair, and made another bounce to the shelf. She seized the little camera in its case, transferred it to her chair and sat down again—on it!

"That's that!" said Dolly.

Margaret viewed these proceedings with dismayed astonishment—Ethel with a chuckle—Becky Bunce with wrath.

"Give me that camera!" hooted Becky.

"Bow-wow!" said Dolly.

"Margaret said I can have it."

"Margaret's a donkey."

"Oh, Dolly—!" protested Meg Ridd.

"Can it, old thing!" said Dolly, "What you need, my simple young friend, is a pal to look after you, and you've got one. Becky wouldn't leave you a jumper, or a pair of stockings if I didn't watch over you like a guardian angel. I believe she's wearing your shoes this very minute. I'm sitting on this camera. I shall go on sitting on this camera till Becky blows away. That's as fixed and settled as the laws of the Swedes and Nasturtiums."

"Ha, ha!" shrieked Ethel Bent, "Do you mean the Medes and Persians, Dolly?"

"Were they Medes and Persians?" asked Dolly, "I don't care whether they were Medes and Perisians, or Swedes and Nasturtiums. I jolly well know that Becky isn't walking off Meg's camera."

"My dear Dolly—!" urged Meg.

"My dear Meg—!" mimicked Dolly, "Can it, old duck."

"If Miss Gadsby heard you say 'can it'—!" murmured Ethel Bent.

"Well, chuck it, if you like that better," said Dolly, "Or stow it! Pack it up! I'm sitting on this camera. Blow away, Becky."

Becky Bunce eyed her with wrath in her greenish eyes. She looked, indeed, strongly inclined to rush at Dolly, and drag her off the camera by main force. But that was not practical politics. There was twice as much of the plump Dolly as there was of the bony Becky. Dolly was master, or rather mistress, of the situation. She waved Becky away, with a plump hand, as if Becky had been a mere blue-bottle.

"Travel!" she said, "Beat it! Hook it! Absquatulate! Burn the trail! Make yourself scarce! And shut the door after you."

Becky gave Meg a look. But Meg, evidently, was not going to drag Dolly off the camera: and nothing short of dragging would have done it. In fact though Meg had weakly yielded, there was little doubt that Dolly's tactics were not unwelcome to her. She really did not want her one and only camera to be left out in the rain, or on the cliffs, or in the middle of Oke Wood. And Becky was capable of any or all of these things.

"Minx!" snorted Becky, glaring at Miss Brace.

"Same to you, with knobs on!" said Dolly, affably. "Good-bye! And shut the door after you—dear!"

Becky Bunce marched out of the study, and shut the door after her—with a bang, a terrific bang that woke most of the echoes in the Lower Fifth studies. Whereupon Miss Brace replaced the camera on the shelf, and sat down again—more comfortably.

"That's that!" she remarked.

Meg smiled faintly, and Ethel chuckled. That, undoubtedly, was that!

CHAPTER THE SECOND.

BAD FOR BECKY!

EDITH RACE, prefect of the Sixth Form, frowned.

Edith was tall, and slim, and over seventeen and a power in the land, so far as Headland House School was concerned. She was Head Prefect of Headland House: and spoke as one having authority, saying "Do this!" and he doeth it—or rather, in the circumstances, "she" doeth it! Small girls in the lower forms looked up to the tall Edith with awe. Even in the Fifth they regarded her with great respect—with the exception, perhaps, of Dolly Brace, who was no respecter of persons.

In a boys' school, a Sixth-form prefect would have wielded the power of the ashplant. In a girls' school, of course, the ashplant was unknown. But Edith Race did not need any such support for her authority. One glance from her calm eyes was generally sufficient. Moreover, a word from Head-prefect might spell detentions, or lines, or both. Over all Headland House girls, junior or senior, the tall calm Edith reigned supreme.

At the moment, Edith was on the upper staircase, from which, glancing over the banisters, you had a view of the passage upon which most of the Lower Fifth studies opened. Those studies at the moment, were deserted. There was a lecture going on in the Lecture-Room, to which all the Lower Fifth had been bidden by Miss Gadsby.

Not a single member of that form, therefore, should have been in the studies, or about the studies. That was why Edith's calm brow was wrinkled in a frown. For, looking down over those banisters, she beheld a slim, not to say bony, figure come into the passage from the staircase—none other than that of Rebecca Bunce of the Lower Fifth.

Becky, evidently, had cut the lecture. Becky hated lectures—few girls loved them! It was Miss Phoot who was giving the lecture, and Miss Phoot was well-known to be capable of overlooking the absence of one, or even of two or three.

But that was not all. There was something very stealthy in Becky's manner—she was walking almost on tiptoe, glancing to right and left as if in fear of being observed. She did not glance upward, or she might have seen a frowning disapproving face looking down over the banisters of the upper staircase. She trod softly and stealthily to the door of No. 8 Study.

At which Edith's frown intensified. Becky had not run up to her own study for something—her study was No. 2. She was going into the study belonging to Margaret, Ethel, and Dorothy—in a stealthy, surreptitious manner. Obviously this little matter required the attention of the Head Prefect of Headland House.

The door of No. 8 closed on Becky, softly, without a sound. She was in Meg's study—and Edith Race, frowning, descended the upper staircase—to investigate.

Little dreaming that the eye of stern authority had fallen on her, Becky, in No. 8 Study, looked round her for the camera.

That was what Becky wanted—chiefly. But all was grist that came to Becky's mill. Having taken the risk of cutting Miss Phoot's lecture, perhaps Becky felt that she was entitled to indemnify herself that risk. And Becky was always hungry for nice things to eat—and there was a box of chocolate creams on the shelf besides the camera. She had noticed that on her previous visit to the study.

There was ample time—the lecture would not be over for nearly half-an-hour yet. Even if she was missed—and Miss Phoot seldom missed a girl—she would not be sought in 'Meg's study. Feeling quite at ease, Becky opened the chocolate box, to deal with the contents before she walked off with the borrowed camera.

Her greenish eyes glistened over it—it was half full. A few would not be missed—and even if they were missed, Meg was not the girl to make a fuss about a few chocolate creams.

Standing at the shelf, Becky helped herself—and chocolate creams went down faster than oysters. They left sticky traces round Becky's rather extensive mouth, and on her fingers. That did not matter to Becky. Chocolate cream followed chocolate cream on the downward path. Becky was quick at this kind of work: and more than a few of the chocolate creams had vanished for ever, when the study door suddenly opened.

"Oh!" gasped Becky. Then she gurgled. A large fat chocolate cream was in transit, and in her sudden surprise and alarm, she let it slip down in bulk.

She gasped and gurgled horribly, choking. 'Urrrggh! Wurrgh! I say, Meg, I wasn't—urrgh—taking your chocolates! Urrgh! Only just one—gurrgh. I only came here for the—gurrgh! gurrgh! wurrgh!"

"Rebecca!" said Edith Race sternly.

"Oh!" sputtered Becky, in terror. She had supposed that it was Meg coming up to the study. Now she saw Edith Race.

Her greenish eyes almost popped from her head.

"What are you doing here, Rebecca?"

"I—I—gurrrrrrgh! I—wurrgh—."

"But I need not ask," said Edith, "You came here to pilfer another girl's chocolates, Rebecca."

"Oh! No! I—I only came here to—gurrrrrrrrgh!"

"You have been punished for this before, Rebecca!" said Edith, stately and scornful, "You are greedy and unscrupulous Rebecca."

"Gurrrrrrgggggh!"

"I will wait," said Edith, "until you have recovered from the effect of your disgusting greediness, Rebecca. Then I shall take you to the lecture-room."

It was a full minute before Becky recovered. She ceased to gurgle, though she still gasped, with watery eyes.

"Now follow me!" said Edith, "I shall report this to Miss Gadsby, Rebecca. You will certainly be given a detention for the half-holiday to-morrow."

"I—I— Meg said I could have the chocolates—!" gasped Becky.

"Indeed! I will inquire of Margaret—."

"Oh! I—I mean she didn't exactly say so—."

"I thought not!" said Edith Race, drily, "You are, I suppose, the

most untruthful girl at Headland House, Rebecca. Follow me."

Becky followed her, in the lowest spirits. It was a lecture after all for Becky, to be followed by a painful interview with Miss Gadsby, and detention. Becky glared at Edith's back, as she followed the tall figure to the lower staircase. She glared at it as if she could have bitten it.

Edith marched on, tall and stately. Behind her, Becky glared—and then shook her fist at the tall back.

It was rather unfortunate that the prefect glanced round at that moment.

Becky's brandished fist was in the air. Immediately she jammed it to her little pimple of a nose, as if her intention had been to rub or scratch that organ. But Edith had seen it. She coloured with anger.

"Upon my word!" she exclaimed.

"I—I—I was scratching my nose!" stuttered Becky, "I—I wasn't shaking my fist at you, I wasn't really! I—I never thought of such a thing. I—I wouldn't! There was a nye on my floze—I—I mean, a—a fly on my nose, and—and—."

"That will do!" snapped Edith.

She marched on again, and Becky Bunce trailed after her. She did not shake her grubby fist again. But if deadly glares could have inflicted the torments of the Spanish Inquisition, Edith Race would have doubled up. Luckily, they couldn't.

"In the matter of perspective—!" Miss Phoot's voice was audible as Edith Race opened the lecture-room door. Miss Phoots was "Arts."

Under Edith's stern eye, Becky sidled into the room, and Edith shut the door on her, and walked away. Miss Phoot, interrupted in the matter of perspective, gave Becky a severe glance: but fortunately she was too keen on her subject for more. Becky sidled to her place—and Dolly Brace winked at Meg and Ethel!—Bony Bunce hadn't been able to cut lectures after all!

After the lecture—which left Becky as blank on the important subject of perspective as before—she clutched Meg's arm as the girls went down the corridor.

"I say, Margaret darling—!" she gasped.

"Still wanting that camera?" grinned Dolly. "Make it dearest darling love, old thing, and still there will be nothing doing."

Becky did not heed Miss Brace. She clung to Meg.

"Margaret, dear old thing, do go to Miss Gadsby—!"

"What on earth for?" asked Meg in astonishment.

"And—and tell her that you did tell me I could have the chocolates in your study—!"

"But I didn't!"

"Oh, do talk sense!" urged Becky, "I know you didn't, but that minx, Race, is making out to Miss Gadsby that I took them—."

"You've been pinching the chocs in our study!" exclaimed Dolly Brace.

"No, I haven't! But Race thinks—."

"Did she catch you at it?"

"You know what she is!" groaned Becky, "I shall get detention tomorrow afternoon, and I want to go out with your camera, Meg. See? But if you go to Miss Gadsby and tell her that you gave me the chocs—."

"But I didn't!" exclaimed Meg, indignantly, "and if you have been bagging them, you are a—a—a—!"

"Greedy little beast!" said Dolly, supplying the missing words.

"Look here, Meg will you go to the Gadfly and tell her you said I could have them," breathed Becky, "That will make it all right."

"I certainly won't go to Miss Gadsby and tell her untruths, if that is what you mean. So let go my arm."

"Minx!" hissed Becky. "I'd do the same for you, any time. Minx!"

Meg and Co. walked on down the corridor. Edith Race's voice was heard.

"Rebecca! You are to go to Miss Gadsby's study at once."

It was quite an unpleasant interview with Miss Gadsby. The Gadfly had a sharp tongue, and Becky had the benefit of it for a full five minutes. She was in quite a perspiration when the Gadfly finished at last: it was almost a relief to be told that she was booked for two hours detention on the morrow and dismissed: at least she was able to get away from Gaddy.

CHAPTER THE THIRD.

UNEXPECTED!

"OH!" gasped Margaret.

"Oh!" gasped Ethel, simultaneously.

"Great piplets!" ejaculated Dolly Brace.

If ever three schoolgirls were astonished, Meg and Co. were astonished now. They gazed—but they could not believe their eyes. They really couldn't! What they beheld was impossible—unthinkable—unimaginable. It was beyond the furthest bounds of possibility. Yet—there it was.

They just stared.

It was the following afternoon—the half-holiday on which Becky Bunce was in detention. The three were sorry for Becky, left in the Detention Room at Headland House: they were sympathetic, though Becky had bagged the chocs. But it was rather a relief that Becky hadn't been able to join in that scramble on the sands and rocks of Headland beach. Becky was rather a worry.

The three were out of sight of Headland House School now: and they had clambered on a high ridge of rocks that ran out from the cliffs into the sea, from the top of which there was a wide view of tumbling waters, and the remnant of an ancient wreck that was jammed on the rocks of the end of the ridge. But they forgot all about views and wrecks as they saw Edith Race, of the Sixth Form, on the other side of the ridge.

Was it possible—was it thinkable or imaginable—that Edith Race, of the Sixth Form, had a cigarette in her mouth?

Was it not? Impossible, unthinkable, and unimaginable as it was, thus it was! In that secluded spot, where soft sand shelved to the sea and the high ridge of rocks shut off all view, Edith Race was sitting on a camp-stool, and in the mouth of Edith Race was—a cigarette!

Her profile was to Meg and Co. She was not looking towards the ridge—and did not see three amazed faces. But they saw! They saw with wide, staring eyes!

At Headland House, Edith Race was always calm, grave, almost majestic. Serene superiority was her long suit. To younger and smaller girls it hardly occurred that Edith was, after all, just a school-girl herself.

At home, in the holidays, it was not impossible that Edith smoked a cigarette or two—in a smoking household. Perhaps she was impatient to be a little more grown-up than she really was. Perhaps her impeccable calmness in Headland House tired her a little, and she found relief in relaxation. But this—!

If Miss Beetle, the Principal of Headland House, had seen that sight, probably she might have fainted. Luckily Miss Beetle was nowhere in the offing. For Edith Race not only had the cigarette in her mouth. A tiny curl of smoke came from it. It was alight! Edith was smoking!

Meg was first to recover. She caught Ethel with one hand, Dolly's plump arm with the other, and drew them back, down the ridge. They had not been seen—now they could not be seen.

"My only summer bonnet!" breathed Dolly, "You saw—!"

"Edith—of all people!" said Ethel Bent.

"Not a word!" breathed Meg, "Edith would feel awful if she knew anybody knew. Thank goodness she never saw us. Not a syllable—especially to Becky. Becky would talk it all over the school."

"Humbug!" said Dolly, "That's what Race is—humbug! If she caught any of us with a smoke, there would be ructions."

"Well, that's not likely to happen," said Meg smiling, "Perhaps her brother in the Sixth Form at Sparshott may have given it to her—"

"Boys haven't much sense!" agreed Ethel, "A boy offered me a cigarette once. Becky says that that fellow Race of Sparshott smokes—she's seen him."

"Becky will say anything," grinned Dolly, "She says that the Gadfly smokes a pipe, with her study door locked."

Meg laughed.

"Come on," she said, "Let's go back. And not a word."

"Not the ghost of one," agreed Dolly, "By gum, wouldn't Edith be down on us if she knew we knew. And a pre. can make you sit up."

The three girls retraced their steps along the beach. They had not covered a hundred yards when they almost ran into Becky Bunce, coming round a cliff with a camera in her hand.

"Aren't you in detention," asked Meg, in surprise.

Becky sniffed.

"I was the only one this afternoon," explained Becky, "So I got out at the window. Nobody saw me."

"But—!" exclaimed Meg.

"Edith Race is coming to let me out at four. Well, I shall be back by four. That minx will find me there all right."

"But hadn't you a detention task?" asked Ethel.

"Oh, yes. But I shall tell Gaddy that I had such a fearful head-ache that I couldn't touch it," said Becky, cheerfully, "Gaddy can't prove I hadn't! I think of things, you know!" added Becky, complacently,

"I daresay you wouldn't have thought of even an easy one like that, Meg."

"I hope not!" said Margaret, drily.

"You've got Meg's camera!" said Dolly Brace, "Hand it over, and I'll take it back with me. Here—catch her!"

But it was too late. Becky Bunce had the camera—and she was not going to part with it. She dodged round the three girls and ran up the beach.

"Hold on, Dolly," exclaimed Meg, catching her friend by the arm, as the plump Dolly was about to rush in pursuit, "It's all right. Let her have it."

"Rot!" said Dolly. "You're soft Meg. Ten to one she will drop it on the rocks, or leave it on the headland. Anyhow she will use the films, and never pay for them."

"Never mind," said Meg, "Let's get back—we'll put in a spot of tennis instead of going up the beach."

"Oh, all right!" grunted Dolly. Then she uttered a sudden exclamation, "I say, that duffer will run into a pre.—Edith Race—!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Meg.

Ethel Bent chuckled.

"Let's hope that Race will have finished her smoke, before Becky spots her," she said, "Becky won't keep mum, if we do."

"Well, nobody ever believes a word Becky says!" remarked Meg. But she looked rather anxiously after Becky—still running up the beach, with the camera under her arm. "Is she too far off to call her back? It will mean a spot of bother if Edith catches her out of detention."

"I'll yell!" said Dolly.

Dolly Brace put both hands to her mouth, to make a trumpet, and bawled.

"Becky! Stop!"

Becky, already at a distance, looked back.

"Pre's about!" bawled Dolly.

It was a good distance, but evidently Becky heard. Equally evidently, she did not believe. Like most people who have little regard for the truth, Becky never believed others. This, to Becky, was merely a stratagem to get her within reach to grab the camera!

She grinned. Then she put the thumb of her left hand to her pimple of a nose, and extended the fingers. Then, as they gazed at her, she put the thumb of her right hand to the little fingers of her left, and extended the fingers of that hand also. Meg and Co. just gazed at her. They didn't "pull noses" at Headland House—but Becky Bunce had her own manners and customs.

Having thus conveyed her scornful derision to the three, Becky turned again, and clambered up the rocky ridge. Dolly breathed hard and deep.

"Race will cop her, and serve her jolly well right!" she said, "Sometimes I feel that I shall smack Becky's head: If I ever do, I shall smack it hard. Jolly hard!" added Dolly, with emphasis.

"Come on!" said Meg laughing: and the three girls pursued their way to the school, where, having gathered in Corisande Cholmondeley for tennis, they were soon playing a double and forgot the existence

of Rebecca Bunce.

Becky pursued her way. Several backward glances having assured her that there was no pursuit she proceeded at a leisurely pace, clambering over the ridge, and reached the top, where she stopped for breath. And the next moment, catching sight of a well-known figure on a camp-stool on the sand beyond, Becky promptly dodged back out of sight.

"That minx Race—and I might have run into her!" breathed Becky.

Then she peered round a rock, curiously. Her greenish eyes glimmered at the cigarette—partly smoked now—in Edith's mouth. The Headland House prefect was smoking slowly—very slowly—but she was smoking—there was no doubt about that—no possible probable shadow of doubt, no possible doubt whatever!

"Phew!" murmured Becky.

For a long minute she gazed. Then she lifted the camera and took aim. Very carefully indeed did Becky's green eyes scan the view-finder, getting that clear-cut profile—with the smoking cigarette sticking out of the mouth—into exact focus. And then—!

CLICK!

CHAPTER THE FOURTH

A HOT CHASE!

CLICK!

Edith Race, of the Headland Sixth, jumped.

She heard that sharp click, and it startled her. In that solitary spot, shut off from view by the high cliffs and the rocky ridge that barred the sandy beach, she had not dreamed that anyone was at hand. But someone, evidently, was—and Edith's face became scarlet and she snatched the cigarette from her mouth—too late!

Edith was not, perhaps, awfully to blame. There were senior girls at Headland House, who, at home in the holidays, smoked cigarettes, and even knew what lipstick was. But at the school presided over by the majestic Miss Beetle, all such follies had to be forgotten. Any Headland House girl who had displayed a spot of lipstick would have been frozen to the marrow by the Principal's stony glare. As for cigarettes—an Atom Bomb could hardly have given Headland House a greater shock than a cigarette.

It was her brother's fault. Arthur Race, of the Sixth-Form at Sparshott School, had given Edith that cigarette. Arthur smoked, like some other Sparshott fellows, chiefly because it was against the rules, and seemed a doggish sort of thing to do. Having met his sister that afternoon, he had passed on a smoke—and Edith, who had smoked two or three in the last holidays, had accepted the same.

Only too well she knew that, between school and home in holiday time, there was a great gulf fixed. Only too well she knew that she was breaking rules right and left—rules which, as a prefect, she had to enforce severely on other girls at Headland House. Only too well she knew that if she were found out, it would mean terrific trouble—loss of her rank as prefect, if nothing worse. And she did not really

like smoking! Nevertheless, all seemed safe and secure in that solitary spot. Then—click!

She leaped from the camp-stool, scarlet, and stared round—the remains of the cigarette instantly abolished under her foot in the sand.

On the rock ridge she beheld a figure that was far from graceful, and a face that could not be called attractive. That face was wreathed in a grin. Becky Bunce had snapped her—smoking!

“Oh!” gasped Edith.

Becky grinned. Then she chuckled. She was caught out of detention, by a Pre. But she did not care—now!

“He, he!” chuckled Becky.

Edith Race stared at her. She collected herself, and became once more the calm, stately Edith that Headland House knew so well. Her voice came calm and clear.

“Rebecca! You are out of the Detention-Room! Go back at once, and I shall report you to Miss Gadsby.”

“Will you?” said Becky.

“I certainly shall! Go!”

“Oh, all right,” said Becky, cheerfully, “I’ll ask Miss Gadsby to help me develop this photograph. I daresay she’ll be interested.”

Edith’s heart missed a beat. She had dreaded it—now she knew! That little wretch—that unpleasant untruthful, unscrupulous little wretch, the dunce of her form, who did not even wash if she could help it—that inexpressible little wretch, had snapped her—smoking! In that camera, in her grubby hand, was evidence that would condemn the head-prefect of Headland House—in an awful interview with Miss Beetle!

It did not matter so much that Becky had seen her, and would tattle. Becky tattled incessantly, and nobody ever heeded her tattling. Becky was crammed with tales of her own invention about everybody. She claimed to have seen Miss Gadsby smoking a pipe in her study—by way of the keyhole! Becky undoubtedly was good at keyhole work! But though Gaddy was rather masculine, in aspect and manner, nobody believed a word of Becky’s tale—it was laughed at as one more of Becky’s romances. Neither would anyone have dreamed of believing Becky if she had related what she had now seen on the beach—such a yarn about Edith Race would have been laughed at even more than the one about Gaddy. But the evidence in the camera changed everything. Becky’s word would not be taken on such a subject—but the evidence of a photograph simply had to be taken!

“Rebecca!” Edith tried to make her voice stern, but it shook, “Come here, and give me that camera at once. It is not yours.”

“Margaret Ridd lent it to me.”

“You very often take other girls’ things without permission. I will take it back to her.”

“You won’t!” said Becky.

“Rebecca! Are you aware that you are speaking to a prefect?” exclaimed Edith, in her most crushing manner.

“Oh, yes,” said Becky, carelessly, “But you ain’t bagging my snap! Think I don’t know why you want to get hold of the camera? He he.”

“Give me that camera at once.”

"I don't think!" jeered Becky.

"I shall report this impertinence to Miss Gadsby."

"O.K." said Becky, "Do!"

Edith Race gasped. It hardly seemed to her that this really could be happening—this grubby little wretch, who was wont to tremble at her frown, answering her with cool cheeky unconcern.

But Becky held the whip-hand—in the camera. Edith realised that—and she realised that she had to get hold of that camera, before it was taken into the dark-room at Headland House.

She made a sudden rush at the ridge.

Becky bolted.

The ridge was rather steep. Edith had to clamber up the steep side, while Becky was downhill on the other. And Becky flew. By the time Edith Race gained the top of the ridge, Becky was at a good distance, her unshapely legs fairly flying on the way to Headland House School.

"Oh!" breathed Edith, pausing a moment. To chase a junior up the beach was altogether too undignified for a Sixth-Form prefect. But it had to be done—and luckily there was no one in sight. Edith rushed down the slope of the ridge, and rushed after Becky. Her much longer legs covered the sand at a greater pace, and she gained.

Becky glanced back over her shoulder, and gave a breathless squeak of alarm at the sight of the prefect in hot pursuit close behind. She put on speed, panting and gasping, going all out. After her tore Edith.

"Oh!" howled Becky, suddenly, as, charging round a bulging cliff, she came in sudden contact with someone coming from the opposite direction.

It was Miss Hatch, Head of the Games. Hatch was rather squat and rather strong, but that charge, so sudden and unexpected, was too much for her. She reeled backwards, clutching at Becky, and they sprawled together on the sand.

"Ooooh!" gasped Miss Hatch, "Rebecca—you mad thing—why—what—ooogh!"

"Ow!" roared Becky, sitting up dizzily, "Wooooh!"

"How dare you rush about in that mad, unmannerly way, Rebecca?" gasped Miss Hatch, sitting up also, "You are the worst-behaved girl at Headland House, Rebecca. You are worse than a tomboy. I am quite upset! How dare you?"

"I—I she's after me!" gasped Becky, scrambling up.

Becky was rather winded. But she dared not linger. Miss Hatch, who was still more winded, sat on the sand struggling for breath. Becky left her to it—and tore on towards Headland House. Only one thought was in Becky's mind—to get that camera away, safe, before Edith Race's hand could drop on her shoulder. Becky raced on, leaving Miss Hatch spluttering.

It was then that Edith Race, hitherto out of sight, came charging round the bulging rock. Naturally Edith, her view ahead having been shut off by the cliff, did not know that the games-mistress of Headland House was sitting on the sand just round the corner. She did not discover Miss Hatch till she crashed.

For the second time that eventful afternoon, Miss Hatch received

a sudden shock. She hardly knew what was happening—only that something suddenly flew round the bulging cliff, and crashed on her, rolling her over on the sand.

"Wurrrrrrrrh!" came in a breathless moan from Miss Hatch, thus spread-eagled, with the tallest prefect at Headland House sprawling on her feet.

"Oh!" gasped Edith, "What—Oh!" She was up in a twinkling. "Oh! So sorry, Miss Hatch—I did not see you—why were you sitting on the sand, right in the path?"

"Urrrggh!" gurgled Miss Hatch. "This is the second time—urrrgh! Where is my hat? Urrrgghh! Edith! Is it really you, Edith? Have you taken leave of your senses! You, a prefect—playing silly games on the beach with a junior girl—racing and chasing—urrggh."

"I—I—I—!" stammered Edith, "I—I—Rebecca has broken out of detention, Miss Hatch, and I—I—I—."

"That is no reason for such action!" hooted Miss Hatch, sitting up once more, "It is the duty of a prefect to report a junior girl who has broken detention, not to chase her along the beach like—like—like a tripper! I am surprised at you, Edith! I am—ooogh—astonished! I may say that I am—gurrerggh—shocked! Give me a hand up."

Edith Race cast a glance after Becky. But Becky was out of sight now, almost at Headland House by this time. Edith gave Miss Hatch a hand up, helped her to set herself to rights: and finally left her pursuing her way, in a very shocked frame of mind and an extremely bad temper.

Then, with compressed lips, Edith walked on to Headland House. She was the calm and stately Edith again, to outward seeming—but inwardly, deeply perturbed, and full of trepidation. Becky had escaped with that tell-tale photograph—already, perhaps, developing it in the dark-room—and what was going to be the result? A cold shiver ran through Edith, at the thought of that snap, handed about in the school, depicting her smoking a cigarette on the beach! Edith Race, in wielding her powers as a prefect, had often made Headland House girls feel sorry for themselves. But now, as she walked on to the school, she was feeling sorrier for her own stately self, than any Headland House girl had ever felt, since the school by the sea had had a local habitation and a name.

CHAPTER THE FIFTH.

MYSTERIOUS!

MARGARET RIDD touched Becky Bunce on the arm as they came out of hall after tea. Meg had weakly yielded in the matter of the camera—much to Dolly's disgust—and the cheerful Becky had had it for the afternoon. But Becky had not returned it,—Becky was extremely unreliable in such matters—and Meg was rather anxious to see it again.

"You've done with the camera?" she asked.

"Eh! Oh, yes," answered Becky, carelessly, walking on. Having

done with it, Becky was not further concerned about it, and did not in the least share the concern felt by its owner.

"Well, where is it?" asked Meg.

"I think I left it in my study."

"You think?" ejaculated Dolly Brace, "You don't know?"

"Well, I know I put it down somewhere, after taking out the roll of films," answered Becky, blinking at her, "I daresay it was in my study. Or it might have been in the common-room. It wasn't in the dark-room, because I never developed the films, and I haven't been in the dark-room," she added, helpfully.

"You used all the films?" asked Meg.

"Oh yes! I'll square for them next week—out of the guinea! I told you I was going in for the guinea prize for the best local photograph."

"What a hopeful prospect!" remarked Ethel Bent.

"Oh, that's all right," assured Becky, "I got five pictures—just before tea. I had to keep an eye open for Race, you know, and I was rather in a hurry? but I can take photographs all right."

"What had Race to do with it?" asked Dolly staring.

Becky winked.

"Well, if she'd got hold of the camera, while the roll of film was still in it—!"

"Why should she?"

"Oh! Nothing! That's telling!" said Becky hastily, "I mean, nothing! Edith Race wasn't after me on the beach this afternoon, and I never ran into old Hatch and upended her, or—or anything. I've simply been taking snaps, and I've got five—"

"It was a six-film roll—!" said Meg.

"He, he! The first one on it wasn't a local view!" chuckled Becky, "It was a very special picture—very special! I shan't develop that roll myself. I sometimes have accidents in developing. I'm taking it to the photographer's in Rodwood—Gudge's. I'm very particular about that picture. They will print out all six for me—and then—He, he! The five local views go to the local paper, to get the prize, you know. But the special one—"

"What's so very special about it?" asked Dolly blankly.

"He, he! Perhaps I'll show it to you, and then you'll see."

"If you like, I will help you develop the roll, Becky, said Meg, "That will save paying for it to be done."

"No fear!" said Becky. "If you saw that picture come out in the developing, as likely as not you'd dish it. I'm not trusting anybody with that picture, till I've got the negative safe, and a print of it."

"But what on earth is that mysterious picture?" exclaimed Dolly.

"He, he! That's telling," chuckled Becky. And she jerked away from the chums of the Lower Fifth, and went away giggling.

The three girls exchanged looks. There was something very mysterious about this—something very mysterious indeed. Becky, it seemed, had taken one special snap of some very unusual kind, as well as five pictures intended for the photographic competition in the Rodwood and Oke Gazette. She was evidently full of glee on the subject. But what it all meant was quite a mystery to No. 8 Study. They had to give it up.

"Margaret!"

Edith Race came up in the corridor. The tall Sixth-Form girl was not quite so calm and sedate as usual, as they noticed.

"Yes," said Meg.

"I understand that Rebecca had your camera this afternoon. Has she returned it to you?"

"No. She thinks she left it in her study, and I was just going there to get it," answered Meg.

"Very well: I will come with you."

Why so important a person as a Sixth-Form prefect took any interest in such a matter, was another mystery to No. 8 Study. However, a prefect's word was law: and Meg went up with Edith Race to No. 2 in the Lower Fifth.

Cora Cook, who had the pleasure—or otherwise—of sharing No. 2 with the charming Becky, was in the room. She jumped to attention at once, at the sight of Edith's tall figure in the doorway, and hastily concealed a bright-covered "thriller" from sight. Cora had rushed up after tea to get on with the perusal of the "Black Hand Baron," which was fearfully thrilling: but such literature was frowned upon by prefects.

Edith, however, did not seem even to notice Cora's existence. Her eyes flashed round for the camera. If Becky had not yet taken out the roll of film—!

"Where is it, Margaret?" she asked, rather sharply. Edith's nerves were getting a little on edge, in these unusual and disturbing circumstances.

"I don't know," said Meg, "Did you see Becky leave my camera in this study, Cora?"

"She never left it here," answered Cora, "I should have seen it."

Edith's lips set.

"She told me she might have left it in the common-room," said Meg.

"Very well, we will go there!" said Edith, with compressed calm.

They descended the staircase again. Meg could see that the prefect was annoyed, and could only wonder why. Her interest in Meg's camera was simply inexplicable—to Meg.

Common-room was crowded with girls—There was a buzz of voices. The buzz was subdued as Edith Race came in with Meg. There was a faint spot of colour in Edith's cheeks. She realised that she was drawing attention to the fact that she was—inexplicably—interested in a junior girl's camera. It was injudicious, in the circumstances, if it could have been helped. But it couldn't.

"Anyone seen my camera?" asked Meg.

"I think it's under the table," answered Jacqueline Herbert, "Something fell off a chair when I took it, and I think it was a camera."

Meg breathed rather hard. That was what Becky Bunce did with borrowed things—left them about anywhere, anyhow. She stooped and looked under the table.

"I'd have picked it up if I'd known it was yours, Meg!" added Jacqueline, "But you don't usually leave things lying about like that."

"I lent it to Becky," answered Meg.

There was the camera, in its little leather case. Meg fished it out from under the table, and as she rose with it in her hand Edith Race

took it from her—almost grabbed it. If only the film was still in it—! Edith jerked the camera from the case and opened it quickly.

"I say, that will spoil the film, if it isn't rolled up!" remarked Jacqueline.

Edith did not heed. She had no objection to spoiling that film by exposure to light—if it was still in the camera! But—it wasn't! The film had been rolled on its spool and taken out. The camera was empty. Edith's lips were set.

"Did you know that the film had been taken out of this camera, Margaret?" she snapped.

"Yes: Becky told me so."

"Then why did you not tell me?" snapped Edith, agrily.

Meg looked at her in sheer wonder.

"You never asked me," she said, "and what does it matter?"

Edith checked angry words. She could not reply to that question. She handed the camera back to Meg, and walked out of Common-Room—leaving a great many of the girls there staring after her.

"What's wrong with Her Highness?" asked Jacqueline, when Edith was safe out of hearing. But Meg could only shake her head.

"Goodness knows!" she answered.

Edith Race was finished with the camera—it was the roll of film that had been removed from it, that interested her now. She proceeded to inquire for Becky Bunce—in whose keeping, evidently, that roll now was. First she went down to the dark-room which all the girls were allowed to use by asking leave. But there was no sign of Becky there. It was a relief to Edith to realise that the film was not, at all events, yet in the process of development.

Becky, after all, was lazy and dilatory. It had more than once been Edith's duty to speak to her severely for that very reason. But she was rather glad to remember it now. The longer Becky put off the development of that roll of film, the better—for the more chance Edith had of getting hold of it before it became a picture—a picture of a Sixth-Form prefect smoking on the beach!

She had to find Becky, and get hold of that film—and now that they were within the walls of Headland House, Becky could not run for it. Edith was prepared to exert all her authority—all her overpowering personality—and even, as a last resource, to shake Becky—shake her hard—to make her deliver the goods. But on inquiry, it transpired that Becky Bunce was no longer within the walls of Headland House—she had asked leave of Miss Gadsby to walk to Oke—and had gone out of gates. Neither Miss Gadsby—nor Edith when she heard—guessed that the sly and wary Becky, having asked leave for the village, planned to catch the 'bus thence to Rodwood, where there was a photographer's shop!

Edith could only wait till Becky came in from her walk to Oke. As that "walk" had included a bus ride it was not till close on lock-up that Becky came—and she found Edith Race standing at the gate.

"Stop!" said Edith, quietly, "I have been waiting for you, Rebecca. I have not yet reported to Miss Gadsby that you broke detention this afternoon. I think perhaps I may be able to excuse you, as—as a prefect."

"Thank you!" said Becky, with a mocking demureness that made Edith Race long to box her ears!

"I want to see the film you took this afternoon."

"It's not developed yet," said Becky, with the same demureness, "I'll let you have a print if you'd like one when it's printed out."

"Where is the film now?"

"I forget!" Becky was not likely to reveal that that film was now deposited with Gudge, the photographer at Rodwood. Edith might have been able to get it away from Gudge—you never could tell what a prefect might be able to do. Rebecca Bunce was taking no chances. And truth had never been her long suit.

"Is it in your study?" asked Edith.

"I forget!"

"You little untruthful wretch!" Edith's temper broke out, "You know perfectly well where it is. I have no doubt it is in your study. Have you hidden it there?"

"Why should I?" retorted Becky, "It's mine, ain't it? A girl can take pictures with a camera if she likes, can't she? If somebody happens to be smoking that's not her fault! I don't smoke!" added Becky, virtuously.

"If you do not give me that film, I will report you at once to Miss Gadsby."

Becky Bunce eyed her warily, but coolly. She had this awe-inspiring Prefect on the hip, and she knew it.

"Oh, all right!" she said, "Shall we go to Miss Gadsby now, before calling-over? May as well get it over: besides I'd like to see her, and tell her about the pictures I've taken this afternoon. I'm sure she'd be interested."

Edith choked.

"Will you give me that film?"

"No," said Becky coolly, "I won't!"

Edith made a forward movement, losing control for a moment of her temper. Becky scudded for the House.

The angry prefect could not rush after her across the quadrangle, as she had done on the beach that afternoon. She could only exercise self-control, and walk with stately leisure to the House. But her feelings were deep.

"What did you get from Gaddy for breaking detention this afternoon, Becky?" asked Dolly Brace, when the Headland House girls gathered in hall for call-over.

"Nothing!" answered Becky, with a grin.

"Didn't Edith Race spot you?"

"Yes, she did."

"Then you've got it coming!" said Dolly.

"No jolly fear!" said Becky, confidently, "Race knows better than to report me to the Gadfly. He he."

"What may that mean if it means anything, Becky?" asked Ethel Bent.

"He he! You'll see whether the Gadfly calls me up anyhow!" grinned Becky.

And they did see! The Gadfly did not call Becky up—Becky, spotted

out of detention by a prefect evidently had not been reported. Race, who had never failed hitherto in that duty had failed for once. Becky, grinning and grubby, was in high feather—and to No. 8 Study it was just one more mystery.

CHAPTER THE SIXTH.

AN ALARM IN THE NIGHT!

SNORE!

That musical sound woke some echoes in No. 2 Study in the Lower Fifth. It was midnight—and Cora Cook and Becky Bunce, like the rest of Headland House, were fast asleep. And when Becky Bunce was asleep, anyone awake within a reasonable distance could not fail to be apprised of the fact. When Becky slept, she snored. And when she snored, a fog-horn at sea sounded feeble in comparison.

Studies at Headland House were bedrooms at night. According to size they were two, three, or four-bedded rooms. No. 2 was a two-bedder. It was fortunate that Cora was a sound sleeper. Otherwise, she would have had little chance of a night's rest with Becky in the same room.

That snore, though perhaps not so agreeable to the ear as the music of the spheres, was a welcome sound to a listening ear outside the study. In the dark of midnight, a tall figure was at the door—probably the only sleepless individual in all Headland House at that hour.

Edith Race listened, and her heart beat. Edith, as a Prefect, had a room to herself: so if she turned out at an unearthly hour there was none the wiser. Not that she did ever turn out at unearthly hours—till now! But this was a very special occasion. Edith had to have that film!

It was strange work for a Headland House Prefect. What Miss Beetle would have said, had she known that her head-prefect was out of bed, stealing through dark shadows in passages and staircases, did not bear thinking of. But Edith Race was getting desperate. She had to have that film before it was developed and printed and displayed all over the school. She just had to! And she had no doubt that it was in Becky's study. All that was needed was to find it there—walk it off, and expose it to light! That would settle it! Then it could go back to its place—harmless. Becky was welcome to develop a solid black blotch if she liked,—in fact Edith wished her joy of it.

With a beating heart, Edith Race listened to that resounding, re-echoing snore from No. 2. Becky was fast asleep—there was no doubt on that point. Cora, it was fairly certain, was asleep too—and if that sonorous snore did not awaken Cora, no sound made by Edith was likely to do so.

Softly she pushed the door open.

All was dark: black as a hat. Edith stepped in, and stood listening again—silent in soft slippers, invisible in a dark wrapper that enveloped her tall figure.

A long minute passed—then she flashed on the light of a little pocket-

torch. Her face was pale, her lips set—she was feeling horribly like a burglar. But she could not let that horrid little wretch keep that snap, and hold it over a prefect's head. She had to find it—little dreaming that it was two or three miles away in Gudge's shop at Rodwood!

There were books and papers and all sorts of things on the table. There was Cora's sewing-basket—but as Becky had borrowed a needle from it, the contents of that sewing-basket sprawled over the table among books and papers. Edith scanned that agglomeration of goods by the gleam of the torch. But the roll of film was not there.

It was a small object to search for—just a little roll of film, sealed in reddish paper, as removed from the camera. Amateur photographers generally took care of their films: but that was not Becky's way—Becky might have shoved it anywhere. Edith had the whole study to choose from.

Her lips set harder, and her eyes glinted. Dearly she would have liked to approach the bed from which the snore resounded, and administer a sounding smack to the occupant thereof. But that, of course, would never have done. She had to have that film.

Minute followed minute, as Edith Race, her heart beating more and more unpleasantly, searched for that wretched film.

Up and down and round about the room she went, the torch gleaming into every likely or unlikely place—in dread every moment that one of the juniors might awaken and take the alarm. If Becky Bunce awakened and heard somebody moving in the room, it was certain that her scream and shrieks would awaken all Headland House. Edith shuddered at the thought. She was very cautious.

But that cautious search was all in vain. Nothing remotely resembling a roll of film came to light.

Edith paused, at last, and glared at the bed from which the snore came. Had the little wretch put it under her pillow for security reasons?

It was only too likely. If it was in the room at all, that was where it was—Edith could not doubt it. But to get it out from under Becky's pillow, without awakening Becky, was no easy task.

Easy or not it had to be done. Tonight was the night—tomorrow it would be too late! Edith at last, approached the snorer's bed, and the light glimmered on a grubby face, a pimple of a nose, and an open mouth. Becky, in slumber, was not an attractive object.

Slowly, softly, cautiously, Edith slid a hand under Becky's pillow. Becky snored on. Had the roll of film been there, Edith certainly would have had it—and all would have been calm and bright. But she could find nothing under the pillow. Yet it must be there—it must! In sheer desperation, she groped—and that desperate grope disturbed the slumberer—and did it! Becky's eyes opened.

They opened, and blinked, as the light dazzled them. The next instant, Becky Bunce was screaming on her top note.

Really, it was enough to startle any girl, to wake suddenly with a glare of light in her eyes, and a tall shadowy figure behind the light! Becky screamed frantically.

Shriek! shriek! shriek!

"Help! Help! Burglars! Help!"

Shriek! shriek! shriek!

Edith shut off the light. She gasped aloud in her alarm. There was nothing more to be done now—nothing but to escape undiscovered, if that was yet possible. She swept to the door—crashed into a chair in the dark, and sent it spinning, and there was another crash as it landed.

"Oh!" gasped Edith.

She groped wildly out of the room. Wild shrieks and screams followed her, mingled now with Cora Cook's startled voice.

"What's the matter? Is that you, Becky? What—?"

"Help! Burglars! Murder! Fire! Help!" yelled Becky.

Edith Race vanished in darkness. Voices and opening doors could be already heard—footsteps and startled voices. Becky screamed and screamed, and Cora, frightened too by the din, added a few shrieks.

Light flashed on in the passage. The deep masculine voice of Miss Gadsby was heard.

"Silence! Go back to bed at once—Margaret—Dorothy—Ethel—Jacqueline—go back to bed."

"But what—?"

"What is it?"

"What has happened?"

"It is that foolish girl Rebecca Bunce—go back to bed! There is nothing whatever the matter—go at once."

The firm manly tread of the Gadfly approached No. 2. The light in the room was switched on and Miss Gadsby strode in. She had a hockey stick in her hand—just in case the alarm might not be unfounded.

But there was nothing alarming to be seen in No. 2—the hockey stick was not required. Cora ceased to shriek as the light went on and Miss Gadsby appeared—but Becky Bunce continued to yell.

"Silence!" exclaimed Miss Gadsby, in a formidable voice. She towered in a voluminous dressing-gown; but she had not delayed for slippers, and her large feet were bare. She looked almost disposed to put the hockey stick to use on the screaming Becky. "Rebecca! Cease that noise immediately."

"Oh dear!" gasped Becky, "is—is that you, Miss Gadsby? Burglars!"

"Nonsense!" rapped Miss Gadsby, "You have had a nightmare—"

"Oh, lor! It wasn't. It was there—it had a light—an awful ruffian with—with a revolver—!" moaned Becky. Becky had a lively imagination, and her terror spurred it into activity, "I—I saw his revolver—"

"Nonsense!" almost roared Miss Gadsby, "Nobody has been here! You have probably eaten something indigestible, and had a nightmare."

"It was a bib-bub-bog-burglar—!"

"Did you see anything, Cora?"

"No Miss Gadsby!" gasped Cora "Becky woke me up screaming. B-b-b-but the d-door was open—oh dear!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Miss Gadsby. She realised that the door had been wide open when she entered. In the natural course of events it should have been shut. Someone had opened that door.

Miss Gadsby's stern brow became sterner. Obviously it was neither of the frightened junior girls who had opened that door. There had been a visitor—from without. Miss Gadsby did not believe for a moment that it had been a burglar. Burglars flew at more valuable game than was likely to be found in a junior study. There was a much easier explanation.

"Someone has been playing a foolish trick!" rapped Miss Gadsby. "It was some silly thoughtless girl from another room. I shall inquire—"

"But he—he—he had a knife—!" gasped Becky.

"Nonsense!" almost roared Miss Gadsby.

"I—I saw it—"

"You said a revolver a minute ago you stupid girl."

"Oh! Did I? I—I mean, he had a knife and a revolver too—a knife in one hand, and a revolver in the other!" spluttered Becky.

"You said that there was a light—!"

"Yes—a light that flashed in my eyes—oh lor!"

"And in which hand," demanded Miss Gadsby, with ferocious sarcasm, was the burglar holding the light if he had a firearm in one hand and a knife in the other, Rebecca?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a trill of laughter from the passage. Many of the Lower Fifth had emerged from their rooms in spite of Gaddy's stern command.

Miss Gadsby glared into the passage.

"Go back to bed at once! I—!" There was a rapid twinkling of pyjama-clad forms, and they vanished before Gaddy had finished speaking.

The form-mistress of the Lower Fifth turned back to Becky.

"If you talk any more nonsense Rebecca, you will be punished!" she rapped, "I will excuse you now—as you have been frightened by some foolish girl playing a foolish trick in the dark. But if you say another word—!"

Becky did not say another word. She dared not, with that look in Gaddy's eye. And even Becky was beginning to realise that it hadn't been a burglar.

"Now go to sleep!" added Miss Gadsby, crossly: and she switched off the light, went out, and shut the door after her, emphatically.

Frowning, she departed. As she passed Edith Race's door, that door opened, and the head-prefect of Headland House looked out.

"Is anything the matter, Miss Gadsby?" asked Edith, meekly.

"Some foolish girl has frightened that little goose, Rebecca Bunce," answered Miss Gadsby, "That is all! The matter must be strictly investigated tomorrow, Edith. I can trust you to discover the delinquent."

"Oh, certainly, Miss Gadsby!" said Edith.

Miss Gadsby was a lady of great penetration. It was not easy, as all the Lower Fifth knew, to fool Gaddy! But even Miss Gadsby, penetrating as she was, never dreamed how very improbable it was that the head-prefect of Headland House would "discover" that delinquent on the morrow!

CHAPTER THE SEVENTH.

FRIENDS!

"CAN I have leave—?"

"No!" rapped Edith Race.

"—To go to Oke—?" pursued Becky Bunce calmly.

"No!" It was a sharper rap than before.

Head-prefect, at Headland House, was empowered to grant leave, for good reason given. After school the village of Oke was within bounds: but in the interval between dinner and the next work-period, it was not. Becky Bunce could have asked her form-mistress: but Gaddy would have wanted to know why and wherefore. She preferred to ask Head-Prefect: and did not seem to be dismayed by a snapped refusal.

"I want to go!" said Becky, calmly.

Edith looked at her. She understood the derisive gleam in the green eyes. She had to make an effort not to box Becky's ears.

"If I can't go to Oke," pursued Becky, "I'll ask Miss Gadsby for leave to use the dark-room. Margaret will help me develop my pictures—."

Edith seemed to swallow something. If that wretched film was not yet developed, the longer it was put off the better.

"On the whole," said Edith, apparently thinking it over "you may go to Oke, Rebecca. Don't be late back for class."

"Oh, thank you!" grinned Becky.

And off went Becky to Oke. Edith glanced over a crowd of girls in the School Field, and noted that Cora Cook was among them. No. 2 Study, therefore, was vacant, now that that grubby little wretch was gone to Oke. The Head-prefect of Headland proceeded to that study—to make one more attempt to discover the film.

She was not likely to discover it! From Oke, Becky Bunce caught the bus to Rodwood, to call for that very film!

The development and printing-out of films cost money. But Becky always had a reserve of cash. Seldom did Becky run entirely out of that necessary article as other girls often did. Her system was a sound one—from a financial point of view. So long as she could borrow, she did not spend.

In this case, Becky, though she did not like spending money, considered that the expenditure was justified. In the first place, she was going to get the guinea prize from the Rodwood and Oke Gazette for a local snap. In the second place, she was going to possess a picture that would keep Edith Race under her grubby thumb for the rest of the term. It was quite a happy prospect for Becky. She parted with her shillings almost as freely as if they had not been her own!

True, the photographs, when she secured them, were not fearfully good. Becky was lazy and careless and clumsy, and generally over-

exposed or under-exposed. She had five local 'views,' and they all looked rather smudgy and obscure. Only Becky, probably, could have fancied that they had the remotest chance of carrying off the guinea prize. But one picture, at least, was good—for Becky had been uncommonly careful with that snap of Edith Race with the cigarette in her mouth.

Becky grinned over that picture. There it was—Edith's classic profile, recognizable at a glance, with the smoking cigarette sticking out of the mouth. What would Miss Beetle say if she saw that? What would Edith do to prevent Miss Beetle seeing it? Anything Becky liked!

Becky marched out of Gudge's in very high feather. She caught her bus back to Oke, and walked back to Headland House—in time for class. She had just time to cut up to her study and leave the photographs there. The five local views she left on her table—anybody might see them. The photograph of Edith she put in her pocket. And the film negative, from which that photograph had been printed, she held in her grubby hand, considering where to place it in safety.

Since the alarm on the previous night, Becky had been doing some thinking. Miss Gadsby had no doubt that some thoughtless girl had been "larking" after lights out—but that thoughtless girl had not been discovered, though Edith Race had done a lot of questioning in the Lower Fifth. Becky, after thinking it over, wondered whether Edith could have named the culprit, had she liked. She had a suspicion that the mysterious visitor of the night had been Edith herself—after that film! Becky was not very bright: but really she did not need to be very bright to guess that one—after thinking it over.

She did not want to run any risks with that negative. If anything happened to the printed photograph another could be taken from the negative. The negative itself had to be kept very safe.

If Edith had visited that study once, she might visit it again—perhaps while the Lower Fifth were in class. Prefects could do lots of things other girls couldn't. Becky was worried.

Finally, she went to the book-shelf, and placed the negative between the leaves of a book. That book was a school prize won by Cora Cook in English Literature. It had been selected by Miss Beetle herself for its highly instructive and moral influence. It was called "Sweet Thoughts." Cora had never opened it. Neither had anybody else. Sweet Thoughts were at a discount in the Lower Fifth. Inside the leaves of 'Sweet Thoughts' was as safe a hiding-place as Becky could find.

Having hidden the negative in the volume, Becky trotted downstairs, just in time to be last in the Lower-Fifth class-room.

For the next forty minutes, Becky Bunce had to dismiss photographs from her mind. Miss Gadsby required attention to the work in progress: and under Gaddy's stern eye, even Becky gave attention.

But at the end of that work-period, there was an interval of a quarter of an hour: and Becky rushed up to her study for her "views," which were to be despatched to the Rodwood and Oke Gazette.

A letter had to be written to go along with them. Becky wrote the letter. It ran:

Dear Sir,

I am sending you five lokal veews for the Photograf Competishun. I hoap one of theese will win the price. Please send the ginney adrest to Miss Rebecca Bunce, Lower, Vth. Form, Hedland House School.

Yours trooly,

Rebecca Bunce.

Becky scanned that letter to make sure that the spelling was all right. Being satisfied with the spelling, she left the study, with the letter and the five prints in a grubby hand.

Edith Race was in her study: Florence Gunn another prefect, was there, sitting on the corner of the table, and swinging her long legs, as she talked to Edith, when Becky presented herself.

Edith turned quite pale. Had that little wretch brought the snap there, for display before another prefect?

"Can I speak to you?" asked Becky, demurely, her greenish eyes on Edith.

"Yes." Edith contrived to speak calmly, "What is it?" But without waiting for Becky to answer, she added, "I'll see you later, Flo."

Florence Gunn, thus summarily dismissed, stared a little, but went out of the study. Edith waited till she was well down the passage, and then closed the door quietly. She stood between Becky and the door, breathing hard.

"Now—!" she said, between set lips.

"I'm sending these photographs to the local paper for the guinea prize," said Becky, "Oh!" The words were hardly uttered when Edith had snatched.

Hurriedly she looked at the five snaps, one after another. Becky grinned at her as she did so. It did not take Edith long to discover that the five snaps were of no importance—being merely smudgy local views.

"There were six films on your roll yesterday, I think," said Edith.

"Just six!" agreed Becky.

"Where is the other?"

"That's telling."

"Why did you come here?"

"I want you to give me a good strong envelope to put them in—I don't want them crumpled in the post," explained Becky.

Edith looked at her, and then, in silence, selected a good strong envelope from her desk. Becky jammed the five snaps and the letter into it, and stuck it down. Then she blinked at Edith.

"Could you let me have a stamp?"

Still in silence, Edith produced a stamp, which Becky stuck on the envelope.

"Thanks," said Becky, "I'll go now."

"Not just yet," said Edith breathing hard, "You have the sixth print—the one you took on the beach."

"I'm not sending that to the local paper!" grinned Becky, "They want local views for the competition—not pictures of Headland House prefects."

"Have you—have you shown it to anyone?"

"Not yet!" said Becky, cheerfully, "I won't show it to anyone, if you'd rather I didn't! I'm willing to be friendly."

"Friendly!" breathed Edith. Her fingers fairly itching to smack! "Friendly" the Head of the Sixth 'friendly' with that grubby little beast! Becky's bullet head had a very narrow escape, at that moment!

"Yes," said Becky, breezily, "One good turn deserves another, you know. You be friendly, and I'll be friendly. See?"

"Where is that print?"

"I forget."

Edith had a gleam of hope.

"If it's anything like those I've seen, it is merely a smudge, and will not be recognizable!" she said, slowly.

"Smudge!" repeated Becky, indignantly, "They are jolly good snaps, I can tell you. I can take photographs, I hope! I can tell you you come out jolly well in that picture—smoke and all! He, he."

"Show it to me."

"Oh, all right!" said Becky.

She disinterred the snap from her pocket. It came out with a bullseye sticking to it. The bullseye was promptly transferred to Becky's capacious mouth.

"Here you are!" she said, "You can see it—don't snatch!" But Edith Race did snatch, and in a moment the tell-tale photograph was in her hand.

She gazed at it, in horror. It was not a smudge like the others—it was quite good and clear. Becky's other photographs were not likely to win the Rodwood and Oke Gazette guinea. But this one was not only likely but certain, to get Edith Race turned out of her prefectship, if other eyes fell upon it.

"Oh!" gasped Edith. And she crumpled the print in her hand: and then, on second thoughts, proverbially the best, rent it into small fragments. Then her eyes fixed on Becky with a deadly gleam in them.

Becky did not seem perturbed.

"You'd like to smack my nut, wouldn't you?" she inquired, cheerfully, "I say, though, wasn't that a good picture?"

"It is gone now!" said Edith, grimly.

"Oh, yes! I shall have to get another taken from the negative."

"The—the negative!" stammered Edith. She had forgotten that!

It was useless to destroy the snap, when any number could be taken from the same negative! She understood now why Becky had ventured into the lions den so cheerily. That picture was gone: but all Becky Bunce had to do was to print another from the negative—the hapless prefect had not improved matters.

Becky chuckled.

"Think I'd have brought it here, if I hadn't got the negative safe?" she asked, "You owe me fourpence for that print you've torn up, Edith Race. I can't afford to throw away fourpence, if you can."

"Where is the negative?" breathed Edith.

"I forget!"

Edith came towards her, was an absolutely deadly look. Becky Bunce eyed her coolly.

"Think I'd be silly enough to bring it here?" she asked, "No fear! You can turn out my pockets if you like. He, he."

The prefect paused.

"I ain't going to show it about," said Becky, reassuringly, "I wouldn't—so long as we're friends, of course. Are we going to be friends?"

"You—you—you little—!" Edith choked.

"Just as you like," said Becky, "I fancy the girls will laugh, if I pin it up on the notice-board. Can you lend me a pin?"

"I—I—I—don't do that!" gasped Edith.

"Are we going to be friends, then?"

"Yes!" gasped Edith.

"O.K." said Becky, "I'll go now."

Edith Race stood aside from the door, and Becky with a cheery grin, left the study. She trotted away to post her letter to the Rodwood and Oke Gazette.

But though Becky, who rather fancied her photographs, had little doubt that she was going to bag the competition guinea she attached a still higher value to the negative now hidden within the pages of "Sweet Thoughts."

Her first idea, when she had snapped that snap, had been to display it all over Headland House, and make that obnoxious prefect "sit up." But it had not taken her unscrupulous mind long to realise the power it placed in her hands. She was not going to show that snap—so long as Edith was friendly! But Edith had to be friendly—very friendly—and was likely to find the friendship of that grubby member of the Lower Fifth very exacting—very exacting indeed!

Prospects, in fact, looked good to Becky Bunce!

CHAPTER THE EIGHTH.

PREFECT'S FAVOURITE!

"CAN anybody understand it?" asked Dolly Brace.

"I give it up for one!" remarked Ethel Bent.

And Meg shook her head.

No, 8 Study couldn't understand it. Other girls in the Lower Fifth—and in other forms,—couldn't either. Quite a number of girls had noticed it—indeed, it rather leaped to the eye.

That was the strangely-assorted friendship that seemed to have sprung up between a Prefect of the Sixth-Form, and the grubby dunce of the Fifth.

Edith Race, as Head-Prefect, had her faults. She might, sometimes, wield the power in her hands too extensively. Some girls thought her hard. Some thought her "swanky." Some even went so far as to declare that she was a "cat." She was not exactly popular. She could freeze you with one icy superior glance. She would step into the studies, and make remarks on the subject of untidiness in cutting tones—which did not make her beloved in No. 8, where the plump Dolly often left a sprawling sweater on the table or an odd stocking on the back of a chair, or a tooth-brush on the inkstand.

But with all her faults, Edith had never been known to make a favourite among the juniors. Now she had—apparently—done so!

Up to a few days ago, Becky Bunce of the Lower Fifth had been the chief object of Edith's lofty scorn and rebuke. Becky really asked for it—for she was lazy, she was untidy, she was slovenly, and she even disliked washing. Many girls had laughed one day when, in open Quad, Edith sent Becky into the House to wash—actually to wash! Becky had gone in, in inextinguishable fury—she did not believe that she needed that extra wash, and she hated washing anyhow. But now—

Now if Becky had walked past under Edith's lofty nose as black as a chimney-sweep, Edith would have said nothing. She had been seen talking to Edith, with a great smear of jam round her extensive mouth, and Edith had taken no note of it. And she talked to Edith whenever she liked. She would come up to her in the quad or the passages, as if they had been pals in the same form. And her manner was not the meek manner of a junior speaking to a high and mighty Prefect. It was absolutely free and easy.

More surprising still, she borrowed things from Race. Becky was a borrower of deadly skill and persistence in her own form: but who could have dreamed that even Becky would have the nerve to attempt to borrow off a Sixth-Form prefect—or that the prefect would stand it if she did?

Yet it happened. She had been seen to borrow Edith's racket on the tennis court—a beautiful expensive racket that Edith never lent even among her fellow-prefects. She had borrowed Edith's bicycle—and only the fact that it was too high for the squat Becky's comfort saved it from rough wear and tear. She had been seen to speak to Edith in the quad, and then cut off to Janet's tuck-shop with a half-crown to spend. That, as Dolly Brace said in her slangy way, put the lid on. When a Lower-Fifth girl borrowed a half-crown from a Prefect what was Headland House coming to? It was almost time for the skies to fall.

And now—! Meg and Co. could not help looking. Five or six other girls were looking. Edith was standing in the quad, after class, talking with Florence Gunn and Honoria Gale, two other prefects—and Becky Bunce trotted up to them, as breezily as if she had been a prefect to.

Meg and Co. saw Florence and Honoria walk away. If Edith chose to chat with grubby juniors in the quad, under the eyes of all Headland House, her fellow-prefects certainly did not.

Edith was left with her junior friend—striving to keep the surging colour out of her cheeks, and failing.

"She'd like to smack Becky!" whispered Dolly Brace, "I know that gleam in her eye! What's she standing Becky for?"

"Seems to be her favourite!" said Ethel, with a slight shrug of slim shoulders. "Queer favourite to choose."

"I believe she'd like to smack her." said Dolly, "Why doesn't she?" Edith's face, certainly, was not sweet. But she was trying hard to conceal the deadly wrath that raged within.

"You little idiot!" she breathed, "Go away! Can't you see you're making everybody look, coming up to me like this?"

Becky Bunce blinked at her.

"Ain't we friends?" she asked.

"Oh! Yes yes! But—do go away."

"If you don't want my company, Edith Race, I'll certainly go away," said the offended Becky, "Besides, I want to ask Meg to help me print out a picture from a negative—!"

Edith panted for breath.

"It—it—it's all right," she choked, "You—you needn't go away, of—of course, Rebecca. Not at all."

"Do you want my company or not?" demanded Becky. Her tone was almost bullying.

"Yes, yes! Certainly," gasped Edith.

"Oh, all right, then," said Becky, "Those two minxes, Gunn and Gale, have marched off. Well, we don't want them. Do we, Edith?"

"Oh! No! Not at all. But—" Edith choked again, "Would—would you like to have tea at Janet's shop, Rebecca? You can tell her to put it down to my account."

"Oh, good," said Becky, "I'd like that! Coming?"

"No!" gasped Edith, "I—I've got to see Miss Beetle. Have—have a good tea."

"I will!" promised Becky. And she did! Becky had not, perhaps, quite so healthy an appetite as Dolly Brace. But she could do great things at a spread when the bill was going to somebody else. Becky enjoyed herself at Janet's tuck-shop—at Edith's expense.

Glad to get rid of her on those terms, or any terms, Edith swept into the House. If Becky had had a little tact, it would not have been so bad. But Becky had no tact—or, if she had, did not choose to exercise it. Perhaps she rather enjoyed scoring over the high-and-mighty Prefect at whose frown she once had trembled. Perhaps the power in her hands was getting into her head. Anyhow she had, for several days, made Edith Race wonder whether life at Headland House School, with Becky Bunce there, was really worth living!

Corisande Cholmondeley joined 'Meg and Co. a little later. Corisande was wealthy and dainty and delicate, and spoke with a lisp, and could not endure Becky Bunce at any price.

"Can you girls compwehend this?" she asked, "That gwubby outsider Becky has just told Janet to put her bill down to Edith Wace. I heard her, in Janet's shop! What is Wace paying for her spweads for?"

"Goodness knows," said Meg.

"Extwaordinary, isn't it?" said Corisande.

"Beats Banagher!" agreed Dolly Brace.

A little later, Meg and Co. had another surprise. They had gone into the House, to go up to their study. On the Lower-Fifth landing they stopped, by the big window, to look out over the cliffs and the sea, and chat for a few minutes. Becky Bunce came upstairs, and passed them—and they smiled as she passed. Becky was breathing a little hard—and had Miss Gadsby seen her at that moment, Gaddy certainly would have bidden her go at once and wash the jam from her face and fingers. Only too clearly, Becky had "done herself" very well indeed in Janet's tuck-shop.

Becky, catching the smiles, passed on with a sniff. She had no special use for Meg and Co.—now that she was a prefect's favourite! If she wanted a camera now, she could borrow Edith's handsome big one—if

she liked! If she wanted a small loan or a big tea, Edith was an easier victim than any member of No. 8 Study. So Becky expressed contemptuous indifference with a sniff, and went on to No. 2 Study in the Lower Fifth. And then—!

Meg and Co., fairly jumped, as they heard her voice, loud and squeaky. Someone, it seemed, was already in No. 2.

"What are you doing here, I'd like to know? I won't have you nosing about my study, Edith Race."

Meg and Co. exchanged glances of amazement and consternation. Was this Becky Bunce—talking thus to Head-Prefect? It was! The three girls waited tensely for the roll of thunder to follow. But there was no thunder!

"I—I—I came to—to—!" They heard Edith's voice, stammering.

"Yes, I know why you came, you minx!" came Becky's loud and angry squeak.

"Be quiet, Rebecca!"

"Shan't!"

Meg and Co. exchanged dizzy glances. Becky had said "Shan't!" to Edith Race, Head-Prefect, right-hand man of Miss Beetle the Principal. It was enough to get a girl expelled from Headland House. At least enough to get her name "writ large" in the Bad Conduct Book. Lines, detentions, reprimands from the Principal, should fall on Becky Bunce as thick as leaves in Vallombrosa. Yet, evidently, Becky did not care. When Becky said 'Shan't,' in a loud and defiant squeak, all that Edith answered, in low tremulous tones, was "Do be quiet, Rebecca."

"I'll be quiet when you get out of my study," retorted Becky, "I don't want you here, Edith Race, nosing among my things."

"I—I'm going—!"

"Well go then," snorted Becky Bunce, "and don't come to my study again when I'm not here. You hear me?"

"I—I—I—yes!" faltered Edith Race.

"Great piplets!" breathed Dolly, "Are we dreaming this? Are we awake, or is this a giddy dream? Or what?"

"I'm waiting for you to go!" squeaked Becky, "Sharp's the word! Cut! And don't come again till I ask you—which won't be in a hurry."

Meg and Co., rooted to the landing, really could not believe that this was happening! But it was! From the doorway of No. 2 Study emerged the tall figure of Edith Race, with scarlet countenance.

She stopped dead as she saw Meg and Co. In a flash she realised that they must have heard. Anyone might have heard, who had happened to be about the studies. From scarlet, Edith's face went pale. She came on furiously.

"What are you doing, loitering about the passages?" she exclaimed, "Have you nothing better to do than to loiter and chatter?"

"We've a right to talk on our own landing!" exclaimed Dolly Brace, warmly. She was indignant. Meg and Ethel said nothing—only stared. They knew that the prefect was exasperated because she knew they had heard. Edith's temper had been sorely tried the last few days, and now it had run away with her.

"Don't be impertinent, Dorothy!" snapped Edith, "I will not allow

loitering and chattering. Go to your study at once."

"Leek here—!" exclaimed the indignant Dolly. But she got no further—Meg and Ethel linked arms with her, and walked her away to No. 8.

Edith Race went down the stairs—perhaps already repentant of that outburst of temper, which could only add to the surprises and curiosity of the Lower-Fifth girls. In No. 8 Study Meg and Co. exchanged perplexed glances.

"What the jolly old dickens does it all mean?" asked Dolly.

But Meg and Ethel could only shake their heads.

In No. 2 Study, Becky Bunce anxiously examined "Sweet Thoughts." There was the negative, safe between the leaves.

Edith, evidently, had been searching the study for it—had she not been interrupted, she might have gone through the books. Becky breathed hard. She was giving the Head-Prefect a high old time—but if that negative was destroyed, it was she who would be getting a high old time! The negative was not safe in that study at all. But where—?

Meg and Co. passed the door, going down. Dolly Brace looked in.

"Why does Edith Race let you cheek her, Becky?" she asked.

"Find out!" retorted Becky.

"Come along, Dolly!" said Margaret, hastily: and the three girls passed on to the stairs.

Becky grinned, as their footsteps died away. A new idea had shot into her mind. That negative was not safe in her own study—Edith would be after it like a cat after a mouse and sooner or later—! But it would be safe enough in another study!

When Meg and Co. had gone downstairs, Becky hurried along to No. 8, with the negative in her grubby hand.

She shut the door, and went across to the window-ledge. On that ledge stood an imitation Chinese jar of lurid hues, containing a bunch of imitation roses. It belonged to Dolly Brace—this being Dolly's idea of study decoration. Meg and Ethel could not help hoping that something would happen to that awful jar—but nothing ever did. It had stood there since the first day of term—a cheery spot of colour to Dolly, who never dreamed that it was an eye-sorrow to her friends.

Becky, grinning, lifted out the bunch of wired imitation roses. Under them, the jar was stuffed with crumpled paper to give support to the bunch. Into the very midst of that crumpled paper, Becky pushed the negative, carefully wrapping it round so that it could not possibly be seen, even if the bunch was lifted. Then she replaced Dolly's bunch in the jar.

The negative was safe now. Becky could retrieve it whenever she wanted it—but Edith Race, assuredly, would never dream where it was. Miss Rebecca Bunce left No. 8, grinning with satisfaction.

During the next two or three days, the Head-Prefect had several opportunities of giving Becky's study the once-over. She even thought of shaking the books, in case a hidden negative might have been slipped between the leaves! But she had no luck! As she never thought of looking in Meg's study, she was not likely to have any!

CHAPTER THE NINTH.

THE LIMIT!

"TAINT fair!" exclaimed Becky Bunce, with deep indignation.

"What isn't?" yawned Dolly Brace.

"They haven't given me the prize!"

"Oh! Ha, ha!"

"You can giggle!" exclaimed Becky, warmly.

"Thanks," said Dolly, "I will!" And she did. So did a good many other girls in the common-room.

Becky Bunce was seated in that apartment, examining the current number of the Rodwood and Oke Gazette. Becky had opened that journal, in the full persuasion that she was going to see the name of Miss Rebecca Bunce as the prize-winner in the photographic competition. Instead of which—!

There was no sign of the name of Miss Rebecca Bunce. Neither was there any sign of a snap taken by the owner of that name. The winning picture was a snap of Rodwood Town Hall, by some local resident. Of all the five selections Becky had taken the trouble to send along, not one had been deemed worthy of the prize! Not one of the five. Becky might as well have spared Meg's film! The guinea had gone elsewhere.

"Tain't fair!" repeated Becky, with deep feeling, "They said distinctly that the prize was to go to the best photograph."

"Ha, ha, ha!" trilled half the common-room.

"I tell you, they said so!" howled Becky, "and now look!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They didn't say that the prize was to go to the worst?" asked Dolly.

"Eh! No! Of course not!" snapped Becky.

"Then you hadn't an earthly, old thing."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Minx!" snorted Becky.

"Hard luck, Becky," said Meg, smiling, "But—"

"Tain't 'fair," said Becky, "I say, this means that they won't send me the guinea! I was banking on it, of course."

"Shouldn't count your chickens too early, old dear!" grinned Dolly.

"Now what am I going to do?" demanded Becky, "I've practically spent that guinea—and now they diddle me out of it like this."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can't have spent a guinea you never had, surely?" exclaimed Ethel Bent.

"Well, as good as spent it," grunted Becky, "I've ordered one of those guinea cameras at Gudge's. I wanted a camera of my own,—Meg is so mean about lending me hers! Now how am I going to pay for it?"

"Oh, my only summer bonnet!" ejaculated Dolly, "Better ask leave to phone Gudge's, and wash it out."

"But I want the camera!" yapped Becky, "I don't want to wash it

out—I want the camera. Now I've been done out of this guinea, which was practically mine. It's very dishonest of those people who run the Gazette for they distinctly said the prize was to go to the best photograph—.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Oh, giggle!” exclaimed Becky, exasperated, “I shall have to borrow a guinea from somebody! I say ‘Meg—!’”

“Come on, Meg—time we got out!” said Dolly, and she caught her friend by the arm and rushed her to the door.

“I say, Corisande—!”

“Sowwy I can't stop!” lisped Corisande Cholmondeley, and she followed Meg and Co. out.

“I say, Jacqueline darling—!”

“Am I a darling?” ejaculated Jacqueline Herbert, in surprise, “I was a minx hardly ten minutes ago.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Yah!” retorted Becky, with her accustomed elegance. And she stalked out of the common-room, leaving the girls laughing.

Becky was frowning as she went. She had banked, as she said, on that guinea prize from the Rodwood and Oke Gazette. Now it was gone from her gaze like a beautiful dream! Fair or unfair, that was that! It was true that she could ask leave to use the telephone, and wash out the order at Gudge's. But she did not want to wash it out—she wanted the guinea camera. Obviously nobody in the Lower Fifth was going to be good for a guinea. But—in the peculiar circumstances—Miss Bunce had other resources.

Becky was not an attractive character. She was dreadfully unscrupulous. But it could be said for Becky that she was more obtuse than anything else. In her own opinion, she was not a bad sort at all. Indeed, had there been a prize offered at Headland House School for meritorious conduct and general praise-worthiness, Becky would have had no doubt at all that she was entitled to it. She did not see herself as others saw her! Few people do—Becky Bunce least of all.

But now it did occur to her that there was a limit, and that she was very near it.

She had borrowed odd shillings, and an occasional half-crown, from Edith Race, but somehow or other this had presented itself to her mind as quite a blameless transaction—she was going to repay those little loans—at some distant undefined date in the future! Some very distant date, extremely undefined! She had tea'd at Janet's, at Edith's expense—but then Edith had asked her to, hadn't she? She had done several other little things at which other girls might have raised their eyebrows—but she was quite self-satisfied. Becky's intellect, in fact, moved in mysterious ways its wonders to perform.

But now—a guinea was a large sum for a schoolgirl! Even a Head-Prefect hadn't guineas to throw about. Could she, if she extracted a whole guinea from the hapless Edith, delude herself into believing that it was a loan she was going to repay later—and that her conduct was quite above par? Becky was not given to hesitating when she wanted anything, and could get it by hook or by crook. But she hesitated now.

Outside Edith's study, she paused—hesitating—lifted her grubby hand

to knock, and lowered it again. Becky had a conscience—of sorts—and it was doing its best to save her from an action which—if she saw it in its true light—even Becky must have admitted to be very questionable—very questionable indeed. She hesitated—but it is well said that he who hesitates is lost! She tapped at last and went in.

Edith Race was at her study table, deep in mathematics. She looked up as Becky came in, and her eyes glinted.

"What—?" she began, in a voice of ice.

"Interrupting you?" asked Becky, breezily.

"Yes!" snapped Edith.

"I've come here to ask advice," said Becky, "We have a right to ask prefects for—for advice! Haven't we?"

"You may go on," said Edith.

"I've ordered something that comes to a guinea, and—and I've been disappointed about the guinea!" said Becky, "It—it's too late to stop it now, and—I haven't the money. What had I better do?"

Edith Race gave her a long, grim look.

She quite understood. This little wretch—this little grubby rascal—was going from bad to worse. For days and days and days she had endured it—her feelings growing deeper and deeper all the time. Becky Bunce's cheeky familiarity had drawn attention far and wide—in the Prefects Room, Edith had heard about it from her fellow-prefects—indeed, once she had thought that Miss Gadsby had been going to speak to her on the subject—even Miss Beetle might notice sooner or later. It was the talk of the Lower School—the Lower Fifth wondered about it the Fourth talked it over, even small girls in the Third Form chattered about it. Becky in her impenetrable obtuseness did not realise in the least that Edith Race was gradually, slowly but surely, getting into a state that might be likened to that of a volcano on the point of eruption!

Now, all of a sudden, she learned it!

Edith Race rose from the table. Her eyes were glinting, and she was breathing hard, and breathing deep. For the moment, all consideration of prudence were forgotten. She made one stride at her grubby visitor.

Becky gave an alarmed squeak, as two strong hands grasped her shoulders.

Shake!

"Urrrggh!" gasped Becky.

Shake!

"Gurrrggh!"

Shake!

"Yirrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrgggh!"

Edith put plenty of energy into it. Never had a carpet or a mat been shaken so vigorously as Becky Bunce was shaken in her strong hands. Becky sagged in her grasp, gurgling and guggling frantically.

Shake! Shake! Shake!

"Oooh! Oooer! Gurrrrggh!" gurgled Becky.

Grasping her shoulder with one hand, Edith threw open the study door with the other. A swing of her arm and Becky tottered in the doorway.

"Now go!" panted Edith, "Go, or—!"

"Guurgh! Urrgh! Yoo-hooh—goooh! I—I'll—I'll jolly well—grooogh!"

Smack!

They did not smack heads at Headland House School. Such an action was unknown and unheard-of in that scholastic establishment. It was a thing that could not happen! But it did happen now! Edith was at the limit of endurance, and she smacked—hard!

"Whooooop!" roared Becky.

She flew down the passage. Edith's door slammed after her. She was left panting in the study—feeling ever so much better! Becky, on the other hand, was feeling ever so much worse. But in this imperfect world it is impossible for everybody to feel equally satisfied.

CHAPTER THE TENTH.

CUTTING A PREFECT!

CRASH!

It had happened at last!

And Dolly herself did it!

For half-a-term, that Chinese jar had stood on the window-ledge in No. 8 Study: a pleasant spot of colour to Dolly's indiscriminating eye: an eye-sore to Ethel and Meg. Secretly, they had hoped that some day Dolly, who was sometimes clumsy, would knock it over—or that one of the maids would demolish it in dusting. They would not have told Dolly, for worlds, what they thought of her taste in colour. But they did get tired of that jar.

And now—! They had been playing tennis, and Dolly had brought her racket up to the study. She was showing Meg and Ethel just how she would have taken a certain service, if it hadn't happened that she hadn't! She was standing with her back to the window, and the tennis racket swung freely—Dolly had a free hand with a racket. Round swung that racket—and—Crash!

Dolly didn't always get a ball, on the tennis court. But she got that jar. She got it fair and square. It flew! It landed on the study floor, with a crash that smashed it into at least a hundred fragments—probably a couple of hundred. Amid the fragments lay the crumpled paper that had stuffed it—and the bunch of wired imitation roses that had stuck out at the top. That jar was a goner! All the king's horses and all the king's men could never have put that jar together again. It had to be written off as a dead loss!

"Oh!" gasped Dolly, in dismay, "My jar!"

She threw down the racket. She gazed at the ruins of the jar. Meg and Ethel gazed, too.

Ethel closed one eye at Meg. But Meg couldn't smile. She loathed that jar—but she felt for Dolly! Dolly prized it! To Dolly's simple mind it was an object of high art. Dolly was very proud of having secured it at the second-hand shop in Rodwood for ninepence. She thought the man must have made a mistake, and that it must be worth pounds and pounds. Dolly did not even know that it had been made

in Birmingham. She fancied that it came from China!

"Oh! That lovely jar!" repeated Dolly, "I've smashed it! Smashed it to bits."

"You have!" agreed Ethel.

"Perhaps—perhaps we could stick it together again, with—with something!" faltered Meg. This was self-sacrifice carried to the limit! But she was so sorry for the dismayed Dolly, that she almost forgot how she loathed that jar.

Dolly shook her head sadly.

"Hopeless," she said, "It's in hundreds of bits. It's done for! Not that I mind so much myself, you know. But it brightened up the study so much, didn't it—made it more cheerful for you!"

"It certainly brightened up the study!" admitted Ethel.

"You don't often get blue and red and green and purple and yellow and a lot of other colours on the same jar," said Dolly.

"You don't!" agreed Ethel, adding under her breath, "Thank goodness."

"I shall never get another like it!" said Dolly, "The man said it was genuine Chinese, and they're rare, you know." She picked up the bunch of imitation roses, "We shall have to put this somewhere else. They looked so natural, in a jar—just like real live roses."

"Did—did they?" stammered Meg. "I—I mean, of course they're—they're lovely, Dolly. Keep them on your desk till we can get another jar."

"I suppose that's all we can do now," sighed Dolly, "It's a shame, but it can't be helped. We shall have to get rid of that rubbish before we tread on it. I'll kick it under the table—"

"For goodness sake don't!" exclaimed Ethel, "Suppose Edith Race or Gunny looked in, and saw broken jars and crumpled paper under the table—"

"Prefects are so interfering!" said Dolly, with a sniff, "Edith nagged me the other day for leaving a stocking hanging over a chair-back. She said it was slovenly."

"Pre's will say anything," said Ethel, laughing, "We'll get Susan to come up with her dustpan and broom, and sweep it up and cart it away. We'll ask her as we go down."

"Oh, all right!" said Dolly.

She arranged the bunch of imitation roses on her desk. Then the three girls went down, and on their way out of the House, apprised Susan of the disaster, and received her promise to repair to No. 8 Study with a hand-broom and dustpan.

Ten minutes later, Susan emerged from No. 8, with a hand-broom in one hand, and a dustpan in the other loaded with fragments of jar and crumpled paper. Which Susan proceeded to transfer to the dustbin out of doors.

That there was a small object carefully hidden and rolled in that crumpled paper, naturally did not occur to Susan, any more than it occurred to Meg and Co. The remains of that jar, and all that it contained, reposed in the dust-bin, in the midst of accumulated rubbish of all kinds, waiting for the next call of the dustman.

Meanwhile, in the quadrangle, Meg and Co. beheld an interesting

intriguing, and unusual occurrence. Becky Bunce was there—and in the brow of Rebecca Bunce was great wrath. And as the three glanced at her, wondering what, as Dolly put it, had got Becky's goat, Edith Race appeared—and hurried towards Miss Bunce. And the latter, after giving her a stare, deliberately turned her back and walked away.

Meg and Co., just gazed.

For a junior girl to turn her back deliberately on a prefect who was evidently coming up to speak to her, was amazing—unnerving. Yet that was what Becky did—with a nerve that was simply incredible.

Not only did Becky turn her back on Edith Race. She also turned up her nose, screwing up her face into the most scornful and contemptuous expression of which it was capable. In order that Edith might not miss any of the scorn and contempt, Becky glanced back at her, as she stalked away.

Edith was left rooted.

Meg and Co. saw it. A dozen other girls saw it! Edith Race stood for a long moment, as if her feet were clamped to the ground: then, flushing, she turned hastily and went into the House. Becky Bunce, lofty and regardless, stalked on.

Dolly Brace glanced at her friends.

"Did you see that?" she breathed.

"Did we not?" murmured Ethel.

"A prefect—Head-Prefect—cut in quad, by Bunce of the Lower Fifth!" said Dolly. "I'm sure we must be dreaming this! And Race is taking it quietly! Why does she stand it?"

"Echo answers why!" said Ethel, shrugging slim shoulders.

"I—I can't understand it," said Margaret, with a rather troubled look, "One might almost fancy that Edith Race was under Becky's thumb somehow. I can't make it out at all."

"See that?" Jacqueline Herbert came up, "What's the name of that game? Think Race has gone in to report her?"

"She never reports Becky—now!" said Dolly.

"Well, what does it mean?"

"Ask me another."

It was simply impossible to guess what it might mean. It was hardly more than a week since Becky Bunce had trembled at the Head-Prefect's frown. And now—Now she turned her back on her in open quad, turned up her nose at her—regardless of prefectorial authority, regardless of staring eyes.

Dolly, who wanted to know, tapped Rebecca on the arm.

"Where did you dig up all that nerve?" she asked, "Do you think you can carry on like that with a prefect?"

"She smacked my head this afternoon!" said Becky, breathing deep.

"Rot!" said Dolly, incredulously.

"She did!" yapped Becky. "She shook—I mean shook—that is, shook me, and then smacked my head. She did."

Meg and Co. smiled. They did not, of course, believe a word of it. On the occasions when Becky told the truth, she suffered the usual fate of people who did not often do so—she was not believed. If Becky related anything at all out of the common, it was taken as one of Becky's yarns, as a matter of course. And head-smacking was so

utterly unknown at Headland House, that it really wanted some believing! The "chums" of the Lower Fifth really could not "see" the stately Edith shaking Becky and smacking her head!

"Draw it mild!" suggested Dolly.

"She did!" hooted Becky, "and I'm going to make her sit up for it!"

"You can't make a Prefect sit up!" said Ethel.

Becky sneered—a scornful sneer.

"She won't be a prefect much longer!" she said. "Just you wait, and you'll see. I'll give her prefect!"

And Becky stalked on, glowering.

"Well, that takes the jolly old biscuit!" said Dolly, "It annexes the Huntley and Palmer! It prances off with the Peek Frean! It beats me to a frazzle, and then some! Either of you girls got the faintest idea what that grubby little chump means by it?"

But neither had.

CHAPTER THE ELEVENTH.

THE FALL OF THE MIGHTY!

"JUST listen!" murmured Dolly Brace.

It was quite unnecessary to listen. The door of No. 8 Study was open, and the voices came in from the passage quite plainly. Meg and Co. were doing a spot of algebra in the study. But they forgot all about algebra as they heard Edith Race's voice, in agitated tones, from the passage.

"Rebecca! Stop a minute."

"Shan't!" came Rebecca's squeaky voice.

"I lost my temper this afternoon—!"

"I know you did!" snorted Becky, "and you needn't say any more Edith Race. I'm done with you! Yah!"

"Listen me—!"

"Shan't!"

Becky's footsteps came on up the passage—towards the door of No. 8. Meg and Co. exchanged eloquent glances. If they had been astonished before, they were simply astounded now. Edith Race, the haughtiest girl at Headland House, actually pleading with that grubby little chump Becky Bunce! What could it mean? They gazed at Becky as she came into the doorway of No. 8.

"Oh! You're here!" exclaimed Becky staring at the three, "What are you sticking in your study for after tea?"

"Dolly's got rather mixed in her algebra, and we're helping her out!" said Meg.

"Like to lend a hand?" asked Dolly.

"No, I wouldn't! Look here, it's a lovely afternoon—why not chuck it, and go and get a spot of tennis?" asked Becky.

"We're going down to tennis later."

"Why not go now?" urged Becky.

"Are there any foodstuffs in this study?" asked Ethel, "If not, why does Becky want to clear us out of our own room?"

"Oh! I—I don't want to," stammered Becky, "But—but you girls oughtn't to be frowsting indoors on a lovely afternoon like this."

"Algebra isn't frowsting!" said Meg, mildly.

"And anyhow, you're the frowsiest little frowster that ever frowsted," said Dolly, "You like frowsting. But go and frowst somewhere else: you're interrupting."

"Why not go out and take some photographs with your camera, Meg?" asked Becky, "It's a perfect light now, and lots of time for developing and printing out, too. I should!"

"Well, you may, if you like," said Meg, laughing, "But I'm doing algebra, at the present moment."

"And you're interrupting it, Becky!" said Dolly Brace.

"Shut the door after you!" added Ethel.

Becky Bunce eyed the three morosely. She had come there for her negative: but did not want to take it from the jar under the eyes of the occupants of the study.

A print was going to be taken from that negative, and pinned up in common-room! That was going to be the awful outcome of the shaking and the head-smacking! A girl had a right to take snaps if she liked, and to pin up a snap for the delectation of other girls—if she liked! And Becky, in her present vengeful mood, did like! There was, as she had said, a good light just then for printing-out—all she wanted was the negative she had hidden in the Chinese jar in No. 8.

"Well, if you're not going out—!" she snapped.

"We're not."

"How long are you going to stick in this study?" demanded Becky.

"A good half-hour yet," said Ethel, "Are you wandering in your mind, Becky, or what? Do you think you can clear people out of their own study?"

"Yah!" said Becky.

She stalked across to the window, the three girls watching her in sheer amazement. It was evident that Becky wanted to clear them out of their study—why, they could not begin to guess. But as they wouldn't go, Becky decided to carry on regardless of their presence. What her object was, was a mystery to the three.

"What on earth do you want here, Becky?" asked Ethel, blankly.

"Oh! Nothing!" answered Becky, "I—I was just going to look at that jar of Dolly's, that's all—such a lovely jar! Where is it? Have you moved it?"

"Dolly's moved it," said Ethel, with a chuckle.

"Well, where is it?" asked Becky, "I only want to look at it, you know. I haven't hidden anything in it, or—or anything."

"You haven't hidden anything in it!" ejaculated Meg.

"No, and if I have it wasn't a negative," said Becky, astutely, "Nothing of the sort. I just wanted to look at that lovely jar. See?"

The three girls gazed at her. That Becky was not speaking the truth was, of course, quite plain. But why she was telling these idiotic untruths was one more mystery.

"Why ever did you hide a negative in that jar?" asked Meg, blankly. "I didn't! I never hid anything in the jar, especially a negative. Besides, it's mine, ain't it?" demanded Becky, warmly, "Look here, where's that jar?"

"Echo answers where!" said Ethel.

Becky gave her a glare, and stared round the study. She spotted the bunch of imitation roses on Dolly's desk. But there was no sign of the jar. Becky felt a sudden alarm.

"I—I say, Edith Race hasn't had that jar, has she?" exclaimed Becky.

"Of course not!" answered Margaret, laughing, "Edith's taste in art is quite different from Dolly's. Besides, it was Dolly's jar. I just can't understand why you should have hidden a negative in that jar, Becky—but if you did—."

"Where's that jar?" shrieked Becky.

"Gone!" answered Dolly, sadly.

"Gone! Gone where?"

"Gone to pieces—gone to the dust-bin—gone for good!" said Dolly, "Sorry, if you wanted to see it, old thing—not that I believe you did! If you hid anything in that jar, you'll never see it again—not unless you go scrambling in the dust-bin, in a heap of rubbish."

"The—the—the dust-bin!" gasped Becky. "You—you—you minx! You just tell me where that jar is!"

"It's true, Becky," said Meg, "Dolly knocked it over with her tennis racket, and it was smashed to pieces. We got Susan to take it away in her dustpan."

"Oh!" gasped Becky, "Why, it's stood there for weeks and weeks, and—"

"Till Dolly got going with her racket!" said Ethel, "When Dolly gets going with a racket, something is bound to go. That jar went."

"But—but the paper inside it—the crumpled paper!" shrieked Becky, "What did you do with that?"

"Swept up with the other debris. Did you hide your negative inside the crumpled paper? What on earth for?"

Becky did not answer that question. She glared speechless at No. 8 Study.

It was gone! It had seemed the safest place in the whole school—inside that Chinese jar! In her own study, that negative, sooner or later, would have fallen into Race's hands. But in that jar, it was safe—safe as houses—or at all events would have been, had not Dolly given a demonstration with a tennis racket in the study!

Now it was gone! Hunting for the lost negative—a small square of celluloid—in the interior of a huge dustbin, amid ashes and cinders, dust and debris, and the torn and discarded paper of a school, was not a practical proposition. That negative was gone—gone for good! Becky Bunce could only glare—speechless.

She was not going to take a second print from that negative now. She was not going to pin up the same in Common-Room for all the girls to see! She was not going to get that minx, Race, degraded from her rank of prefect. She was never going to see that negative again—the pictured record of Edith Race smoking a cigarette on the beach had vanished as if it never had existed.

"Oh!" gasped Becky, at last, "Cats!"

"But—my dear Becky—!" protested Meg.

"Minxes!" roared Becky.

"I'll lend you my camera again!" said Meg, soothingly, "You can

take another photograph just as good, and take more care of the negative next time—.”

“You—you—you idiot!” spluttered Becky, “Think Edith Race will smoke another cigarette on the beach just to let me snap her again!”

“WHAT!” almost howled No. 8 Study, with one voice.

They fairly jumped.

Back to their minds came the recollection of that scene on the beach—when from the rock ridge they had beheld the astonishing sight of the head-prefect of Headland House with a cigarette in her mouth. They had said no word about it—indeed had almost forgotten the incident. Now they remembered it—and remembered, too, that on that afternoon, Becky Bunce had gone off in that direction with Meg’s camera in her hand. Now they understood! What had mystified and puzzled and perplexed them so long, became suddenly clear.

“Becky!” gasped Margaret, “You didn’t snap Edith—!”

“She did!” breathed Ethel.

“Horrid little beast!” said Dolly, in utter disgust, “That accounts for—for everything. She had that snap, and had Edith under her thumb. She says that Edith smacked her head! Let us smack it too, shall we?”

“Cats!” shrieked Becky, “Minxes! Now you’ve gone and spoiled everything and if Race finds out that that negative is gone—.”

“Hush!” breathed Margaret, as a tall figure appeared in the doorway. They had all forgotten that Becky had left Edith in the passage. They were reminded of it now!

Edith Race was calm and stately. But there was a glint in her eye that told its own tale. Meg and Co., knew that she had heard what had been said in the study. Indeed, as she was in the passage, and the door was open, she could hardly have helped hearing.

Only Becky, who was not quick on the uptake, did not realise at once that her power over the prefect had broken like a reed in her grubby hands. Meg and Co. gazed silently at the Head-Prefect. Becky gave her a glare.

“What are you poking in for?” she demanded, “You’re not wanted here, Edith Race. Just get out of this study.”

Edith Race surveyed her calmly, as from an immense height. Her mind was quite at ease now. Her own fingers had torn up the only print taken from that negative: and the negative itself was now gone. She breathed freely. She had been under this little wretch’s thumb. Now she was once more the all-powerful Head-Prefect of Headland House School,—Becky Bunce a mere inconsiderable microbe in comparison. It was a moment of deep satisfaction for Edith Race of the Sixth Form.

“Are you aware, Rebecca, that you are speaking to a prefect?” she asked, with majestic calm.

“You jolly well wouldn’t be a prefect long, if—if—!”

“Be quiet, Becky, for goodness sake!” breathed Meg.

Becky opened her capacious mouth again—but shut it. It dawned upon her, in her turn, that Edith had heard all—and knew that the negative was gone—and that there was nothing more to fear. Race of the Sixth was no longer under her thumb—she, on the other hand, was a grubby junior with the Head Prefect’s baleful eye on her! Becky was dumb.

"I think," said Edith, with unmoved calm, "that you forget yourself, Rebecca. For speaking to a prefect in such a manner, it is my duty to report you to Miss Beetle."

"Oh, lor'!" mumbled Becky, "I—I—I say—."

"If you have anything to say, you may say it!" said Edith, calmly.

"I—I—I—!"

"Say you're sorry, you little idiot!" whispered Dolly.

"I—I—I'm sorry, you little idiot!" gasped Becky, "I—I—I mean, I—I'm sorry—I didn't mean—I never meant—I—oh, crikey!"

"I will not," said Edith, with calm consideration, "report you to Miss Beetle on this occasion, Rebecca. But you must be very careful in the future. Now go immediately to your study—!"

"I—I—I—!"

"And write out the whole of Gray's Elegy—."

"Oh, lor'!"

"And if it is not written very carefully, without blots or smudges, I shall report you to Miss Gadsby for detention."

"I—I—I—!"

"Go!" rapped Edith.

Becky Bunce gave her one look—and went. Edith taking no notice of the others in the study, swept out, and departed. Meg and Co. looked at one another.

"So that was it!" said Meg.

Dolly whistled.

"That was it!" she said, "and now—!"

"Now that grubby little wretch has got the Head-Pre, down on her for the rest of the term!" said Ethel.

"And serve her jolly well right!" said Dolly.

THERE was no doubt that the Head Prefect of Headland House School was "down" on Becky Bunce of the Lower Fifth. Her fellow-prefects, who had marvelled at her toleration of that grubby junior, had no more cause for marvel of that kind—rather it seemed to them that the Head-Prefect went out of her way to visit Becky's many sins with unerring judgment.

As Becky did not even dream of mending her ways, and continued to be lazy, unpunctual, untruthful and slovenly as of old, a prefect determined to carry out her duty to the uttermost had many opportunities.

For a week, at least, Becky Bunce had a very tough time. During that week, life at Headland House hardly seemed worth living to Becky. Impositions, detentions, fell on her like hail: and she could hardly meet Edith Race's eye, without being told to go and wash, or to brush her hair. It was really tough: and girls who had wondered why Edith Race had made a favourite of her, now wondered at the change. Only three knew—and they said nothing: and all the members of No. 8 Study agreed with Dolly's verdict that it served her jolly well right!

THE END.

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