

THE PAPER NO SCHOOLGIRL CAN AFFORD TO MISS!

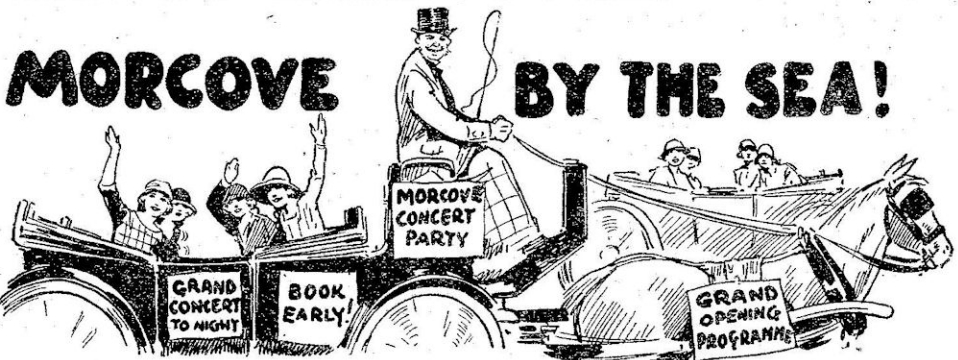
The Schoolgirl's Own 2nd



THE MORCOVE CONCERT PARTY!

An incident from this week's
special holiday complete tale
of Betty Barton & Co.

The First of a New Series of Morcove Seaside Stories.



By MARJORIE STANTON.

For two purposes Betty Barton & Co., the famous chums of Morcove School, travel to Sandmouth. One is for a holiday, the other to assist in the obtaining of funds to rebuild a hospital. Unexpectedly, however, a third purpose looms in prospect—that of helping little Amy Ashdown, the friendless scullery-maid.

The Day Has Come.

"THERE'S the sea! Look—look!"

"Hurrah!"

"Yes, wather! Haw, haw, haw! That's all wight, geals, what?"

"Ooo, how jolly eet will be! I so excited, I want to dance!"

"You'll get a chance to do your own wonderful dance, Naomer darling, by-and-by," said Betty Barton, laughing across at the impish youngster who was Morcove's royal scholar. "First performance this evening!"

"Yes, wather, bai Jove! And what a cwowd we are bound to dwaw, geals, what? The idea, bai Jove, is so extwaordinawily owiginal!"

Above the rattle and roar of the train Polly Linton made her mirthful voice more than merely audible. She almost shouted:

"It is quite certain, Paula, your turn is going to be original enough, anyhow! The last time I heard you practising your songs—"

"Now, Polly deah, don't you make any dis-pawgawing wemarks about my voice. My voice," elegant Paula Creel reminded the company in general, "has been pwonounced a wich cou-wal-to."

"Oh, I see!" answered teasing Polly. "Then you must have warbled the style of song that made me think you were rubbing a wet cork on a window-pane! Anyhow, I suppose every concert party must have its dud! And you do at least make up for it in looks, Paula dear!"

"Yes, wather! Which weminds me—" Morcove's elegant one exclaimed gravely; and out came her pocket vanity-case now that Sandmouth railway-junction was in sight.

There were eight girls in all, nicely filling this first-class compartment of a train that was packed from end to end with holiday-makers. Seven were girls, and theirs were the same pretty faces that were so often to be seen by anyone looking in at Study 12 at Morcove School during term-

time. Miss Redgrave—that youthful and popular assistant mistress of the Fourth Form—was in sole charge. A big responsibility, perhaps, yet it was one that did not seem to weigh very heavily upon her.

On the contrary, Ruth Redgrave's own pretty looks were just as serene and jolly as any of the girls'. Nor did she fail to join in the peals of laughter which suddenly went up as the carriage swerved and jolted just outside the junction, throwing excitable Naomer into Paula's lap.

"Heal!" yelled Paula. "I'm squashed! I'm a weck—a wuin!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I very sorry—"

"Sowwy, bai Jove!" was Paula's aggrieved echoing of the dusky one's tittered apology. "Now look heah, geals; once and for all! Before mattahs weach a cwisis, you know—"

"We are there!" cried Polly boisterously; and she began to reach down such belongings of hers that had been wedged upon the rack. "Come on, girls!"

"I was about to wemark, geals; we must have an understanding. I have not come away with you to have my life wendered intolewable. Pway gwant me a bit of west, a bwief wespite fwom —"

Wallop! came down a cardboard hat-box at that instant, unluckily smashing Paula's hat over her left eye.

With a dismal "Heal!" she looked about with the other optic, presenting such a dazed and comical appearance that her chums simply shrieked again.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, did it fall on you, Paula dear?" Polly said surprisedly. "So sorry!"

"Sowwy, bai Jove! Look heah—"

But now the brakes were grinding, and Paula's rightecus protests were lost amidst the excitable comments of her high-spirited chums.

With the train drawing into the station, they could see how crowded the platform was with sun-browned folk who had come to meet relations and friends.

Handkerchiefs were a-flutter; a babel of cries of recognition and greeting rose above the bawling of the porters:

"Sandmouth—Sandmouth! All change, please!"

"Paula darling, we get out here," Polly said, as if stating a very remarkable fact.

"Yes, wather, and look at me—a weck!" sighed the dishevelled one, getting busy with her comb and mirror again. "Ah, dear, wait a moment, geals! I say, don't huwwy, you know!"

Out bundled Betty and the rest, however, the instant the train was at a standstill. Miss Redgrave followed, looking amused at the way they stampeded towards the luggage-vans to claim their belongings. As for Paula, she was still fussing with her hair when a purple-faced, elderly porter looked into the carriage.

"Sandmouth, miss!"

"Yes, wather! I am weal aweah——"

"Where are you for, miss?"

"Sandmouth, bai Jove; yes, wather! I am just coming, portah; thanks—thanks for weinding me! It's quite all wight."

The assurance, however, seemed to leave the porter with a doubt in his mind. He passed on, whilst Paula very deliberately gathered up her few things and elegantly stepped down on to the crowded platform.

"Er—what about my luggage, geals?" was her bland inquiry, as she sauntered up when all the bustle and commotion had ended. "I twust they have not been wough with it, what? There was a weed-basket——"

"There is the reed-basket," grinned Polly, pointing to a considerably squashed one. It was at the bottom of a great barrow-load with which the porter was trundling off. "So don't worry, dear!"

"Wowwy, bai Jove! Heah, heah—dwop it! My gwacious!" Paula groaned despairingly, and she wrung her hands as the porter rushed on with the barrow, each jolt causing the topmost trunks and bags to settle heavier than ever upon the basket.

"Come on—come on!" clamoured Polly, seizing the horrified duffer by the arm; and so Paula had to let the luggage go one way whilst she and the girls, preceded by Miss Redgrave, passed out through the booking-hall.

A couple of open carriages, such as are still in vogue at seaside towns, had been ordered in advance. Each had a jovial-looking driver in a shiny top-hat and shiny coat with tarnished buttons. It took madeap Polly only an instant to guess that a certain prank she had meditated would not be resented by these drivers. So, in a flash, she whipped out a few printed bills that had travelled with her in an attaché-case.

"Now then!" chuckled Polly, getting busy whilst Miss Redgrave was seeing about the luggage.

In a minute or less, all sides of the carriages were adorned with the small placards, for Polly's chums eagerly took a hand in the good work. Miss Redgrave, when she came along and saw what had happened, only laughed. After all, "it pays to advertise," and what a fine advertisement this was—for the two carriages to drive off at last, placarded with such announcements as:

THE MORCOVE
CONCERT PARTY!

and

COME TO THE
GRAND CONCERT
TO-NIGHT!

Paula got over her embarrassment and was all chuckles at last, whilst she and her chums were driven through the sunny streets, attracting the attention of thousands.

"Haw, haw, haw! I do feel widiculous!"

"Good cure for stage-fright, isn't it, Miss Redgrave?" grinned Polly. "Not that I am likely to suffer from that, I hope!"

"I should say not, indeed!" was the laughing rejoinder of the mistress.

At last the two carriages drew out on to the parade, and children with spades and pails came rushing up from the sands to learn what all the excitement was about, whilst people deserted their deck-chairs round the bandstand to get a glimpse of the girls.

It had only to be known that here were the schoolgirl singers for the enthusiasm to be immense. The bills had been out a whole week now, telling all Sandmouth and its thousands of visitors that the Morcove Concert Party was coming. The Press, too, had been very good to the enterprising Morcovians, since the motive for their tour of the seaside resorts was such a laudable one.

"Oh, those are the girls we heard about!" was the eager cry Betty & Co. heard again and again. "They have got up a concert party, to collect money for rebuilding a hospital."

"What a capital idea!"

"So splendid of them, too!"

"Oh, dear, this is becoming rather awful," Polly grimaced and her chums looked even more embarrassed. "Now I wish I had thought again, before hanging out those placards!"

"Well, it's only a short distance now," was Miss Redgrave's comforting assurance. "Our landlady's house is not far from the bandstand, she said in her letter."

"Channel Terrace—here we are!" Betty commented, seeing the name on an enamel plate. "Now for Number 12."

"Good old Number 12—same number as our study!" laughed Polly. "I say, though—my word!"

There was, in fact, rather a jar to all their spirits, now that the carriages were drawing in to pull up outside Number 12. Miss Redgrave looked really dismayed.

"I do hope, girls, you are going to be comfortable; but the house looks rather——"

"Yes, it does," agreed Madge Minden, smiling soberly.

"Wather! Howevah, it's all for a good cause, geals!"

They alighted, and were glad to go swarming up the concrete steps of Number 12, so as to escape the cordial attentions of the crowd that thronged the pavement.

No one had come to the door, and as it was standing open to the sunshine and the sea breezes, Miss Redgrave walked in. So did the girls.

"Um!" murmured Polly. "The sea air smells funny. Not like Morcove."

"Is it the sea, or is it Irish stew?" debated Tess Trelawney. "Well, there are worse things than Irish stew for lunch."

"There are, but not many," laughed Helen Craig. "Look out, Paula!"

This timely warning enabled the elegant one to skip back from the mirror in a bamboo hall-stand, as someone came forward at last with a slipshod step.

"Well now, jist fancy, and I thought it was the later train you were a-coming by!" burst forth an untidy, angular sort of woman who could only be Mrs. Juddings, the landlady.

"No, this was the train, as my letter said—"

"Well now, jist fancy! But how are you, Miss Redgrave, and I'm sure I'm pleased to welcome you! And these are all your gels, are they, bless their 'arts! How d'you do, my dears?"

Polly went outside to get a laugh, and Paula followed, to gasp for fresh air.

"Healp," Paula said faintly. "She's a tewwow!"

"Oh, she's all right; heart of gold, I dare say," chuckled Polly. "But does she always use blacklead for face powder?"

The pair of them went back, to find that Mrs. Juddings had begun voluble apologies for being rather in a muddle. Her other guests had suddenly packed up and gone—and no wonder! So Betty & Co. were inclined to think.

"But if you'll go up, young ladies, I'll show you which is your rooms, and then I'll get the young gel that's with me to see to all you want!"

So saying, Mrs. Juddings began to precede her guests up the shabby stairs, but paused to call down over the banisters to a basement kitchen:

"Amy! See to the stoo, that it don't burn! Now, young ladies," she said, with her most ingratiating smile, and the ascent was resumed.

Five minutes after this, Polly was to be seen lying back in a crazy wicker chair, almost bursting her sides with silent laughter.

"He, he, he! What a scream, Betty! No wonder everybody else has fled!"

"Poor Miss Redgrave!" was Betty's rueful remark. "She is quite upset, you can see, at the—the awful surprise it is. We must make it quite clear to her, Polly, darling; she is not to blame. The place was recommended—"

"Only," Polly laughed on, "it has changed hands this season, and so we have dropped in for it nicely! I wonder how Paula is enjoying it, Betty?"

Even as the chuckling words were said, the door flashed open and a wild-looking Paula came in. She fell back against the shabby wall and panted for breath.

"Healp! My gwacious! Oh, howwows!"

"Now what are you grumbling about?" grinned Polly, getting up. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Is it a dream?" Paula gasped, passing a hand across her forehead. "I'm in the woom next door, with Naomer. I went to awwange my hair at the dwessing-table, bai Jove, and—and—did you hear a cwash, geals?"

"There have been so many crashes," pleaded Betty. "Which one was yours, Paula?"

"Mine, bai Jove, was the dwessing-table dwopping to pieces. Yes, wather! In fact, geals, it's a weck, a wuin! And Naomer went to take hold of the wash-jug, but there was no handle."

"Well—"

"There's no soap!" wailed Paula. "There's nothing!"

"There is always the smell of stew," corrected Polly blithely. "Cheer up, Paula, darling. It's for a good cause."

"And, anyhow, we'll be moving on to the next town in a day or so," added Betty. "But I

would like that jug of water that was promised to come along, so that we could get a wash."

Then the three girls—the only ones who were here—gave heed to a sound from the stairs that was rather alarming. It was as if some very small person was desperately coming up the stairs in a perilously overladen state.

Slowly one heavy step followed another, and at every instant, as the girls listened, they expected to hear a sudden appalling commotion as the small person came to grief and went down the stairs like an avalanche.

"I can't stand this; the suspense is too awful," Polly said at last, with a mock-tragic look.

So she went from the room, and Betty and Paula followed, to come upon a sight about as pathetic as any they had ever seen.



THEIR OLD ENEMY! In sudden excitement Polly pointed to the window, where two girls on a motor-bike were going by. The passenger was a stranger to them, but they recognised the motorist in a flash. "Cora Grandways!" breathed Polly. "Eother her! What's she doing here?"

With only one more step to negotiate before she reached the landing, was a girl of school age, weighed down by the several enamelled jugs of hot water which she had been bringing from the bath-room on the floor below.

What made her over-taxed state seem all the more pathetic was the desperate smile which she raised as the three Morcovians surprised her at the task.

"Oh, you poor thing!" Polly exclaimed compassionately. "Do let us help you. Who are you—Amy, I suppose?"

"Yes, I'm Amy," said that girl breathlessly.

And, surely, never did simpler introduction bring one girl into the lives of others, with so much of a fateful nature to be the outcome of the meeting!

Their Enemy.

At first sight she looked such an unattractive little thing—coarse-aped and untidy, and perhaps not caring much about her personal appearance.

But this first impression was entirely corrected the instant these three Morecivians were with her in the bed-room. No sooner had she set down the one jug of water which they had left her to bring in, than she seemed to be visibly distressed at her untidy state.

Quickly she smoothed the hair away from her hot forehead, and pulled her poor clothes into better order, to make the best of them. Even before she had done this, Betty and Polly and Paula had seen that she was really a very pretty girl, and that with only half a chance she would look as nice as any of them.

"I say, are you the only help that Mrs. Juddings has?" Betty asked in dismay. "No daily woman coming in?"

"No, I'm the only one now," was the subdued answer. "Visitors who have engaged apartments because they were recommended only stay a night; some have refused to come inside the place. We are clean—at least, I'm doing my best!" the poor little thing pleaded, still panting for breath. "But we are all in a muddle. I am sorry for Mrs. Juddings."

"She hasn't got the knack—is that it?" suggested Polly.

"She thought she'd have a try at running a boarding house, but she doesn't seem to be cut out for it," was the answer that might have been expected. "She used to be cook at a big house where I was scullery-maid. She left—"

"And you came with her? Oh, then, you are related?" Polly guessed again.

But this time Amy shook her head.

"No, I'm no relation. Mrs. Juddings left before I did. She left when the owners of the property went abroad. I stayed on with some people who rented the big house, furnished. But I—I was not happy, so I—I left, too."

"Mrs. Juddings is nice to you, Amy?"

"I mustn't complain," was the stoical answer. "Of course, everything going wrong makes her touchy. But, please, I must go on down now, for there's such a lot to do."

She was stepping to the door whilst the girls were quickly exchanging glances. Betty & Co. could read one another's minds in the most wonderful way at times. In a flash and without a word they often arrived at a unanimous agreement.

"One moment, Amy!" Betty suddenly exclaimed, stepping after her. "Perhaps you know we are going to give a concert on the sands this evening?"

"For a charity, miss; yes—"

"You should have a free front seat, only there are no tickets to be sold or given away in advance! The crowd will just roll up. At least, we hope it will!" laughed Betty. "But you'll come, won't you?"

"Do, Amy! We shall look for you!"

"Yes, wather!"

"If you are there, we shall know you are at least getting a bit of time off," said Betty. "And—and—do buy yourself whatever you like with this," came flusteredly, along with a half-crown that was slipped into the little toil-worn hand. "We feel sorry for you."

"Sowwy, bai Jove!" exclaimed Paula distressedly, after the maid of all work had vanished,

overcome by the kindness that had been shown.

"Geals, it's pwetty awful, what?"

"Poor little soul!" murmured Polly. "I shouldn't be surprised if she has to do a lightning change now, and wait at table."

Nor was Polly's prediction falsified.

When Miss Redgrave and the girls assembled in the rather shabby dining-room, for a belated lunch, Amy was whisking in and out, bringing in the things. She had made that lightning change, right enough, and was now the only appetising feature of the lunch-hour.

She was more often than not in the room, and it was not until the meal was over that Miss Redgrave was free to speak her mind, with only the scholars to hear.

"I would have taken you out to lunch, girls, only there really is so much to do in the short time we have, before this evening's performance. For the same reason, it is quite impossible to go looking for fresh quarters."

"It's quite all right, Miss Redgrave!" they all spoke up heartily. "We are treating it as a joke!"

"Yes, wather! Haw, haw, haw—"

"Except little Amy; it's no joke to see how she is kept so busy!" sighed Madge. "Well, we must do all we can for her."

"Bai Jove, wather! Amy is a wipper, geals, a weal bwick! Just as Mrs. Juddings, bai Jove, is a weal sweam, haw, haw!"

"Sh! She'll hear!" grinned Polly.

"For at that moment Mrs. Juddings was in the hall, doing her best to 'hook' some people who were searching the crowded town for apartments. They were not to be caught—and no wonder, as the chums could not help remarking again, with half-sad smiles, as they heard the potential boarders depart.

After the hour or so in the stuffy environment of No. 12, Channel Terrace, it was good to get a run out of doors to see something of the parade and the town. And how heartening for Betty & Co. to be confronted, wherever they went, with bills advertising to-night's unique charity concert.

They were all for remaining unknown, now, as the girls who later on would be trying to conjure money from the holiday-makers by such talent as they had to offer. Very warily, therefore, they visited that spot on the seashore, just under the parade, where the performance was to be given.

A local music shop had already sent along the piano and the small platform that it had contracted to supply. A couple of men were busy rigging up curtaining, so that the girls could have a retiring place in between the turns. They did not disclose their identity to the workmen; but one thing Madge simply had to do. She just had to try the piano.

"Ripping!" was her whispered verdict, after she had fingered the keys for a moment. "So that's my one anxiety set at rest!"

"Then you are lucky, Madge dear," sighed Paula, as they moved on, mounting to the broad parade. "As the hour approaches, I feel gravely concerned about the numewous maitahs, yes, wather. I twust the sea air is not disagweeing with my thwoat, but I feel at pwesent as if I could not sing a note!"

"Then you'll have to play up all the better in the sketch you are to do with me!" chuckled Polly. "You remember—"

"Er—the twouble as wegards the sketch is," deplored Paula. "I do not wemember, at pwesent,

one word of my part. It is wather remarkable; quite distwessing. My memow is a blank!"

"Oh dear!" Betty commented, with a mock look of dismay. "You mustn't let us 'down, Paula!"

"At the wovst, Betty deah, I can always go wound with the box. Yes, wather. In fact, geals, wouldn't it be wather a good idea, bai Jove, if I confined my effowts to going wound with the box? A geal with a certain amount of charm—what?"

They had returned to No. 12 Channel Terrace by that time, and had let themselves in to the front room, which overlooked the street.

Suddenly Polly, who had been looking out of the window, gave an excited shout, as she caught sight of a familiar figure, going by on a motor-bike, the sidecar that was attached to it holding a girl passenger who was a complete stranger to the chums.

But they all, like Polly, knew the girl motorist herself in a flash.

"Cora Grandways!"

"Bai Jove! Geals——"

"Bother her! What's she doing here?" grimaced Polly, stamping a foot with vexation. "As if we don't have enough of her at Morcove!"

"She's seen us—she's stopping!" murmured Madge, looking annoyed.

It was true! Catching sight of the chums at the window, Cora had drawn up to the kerb. Betty & Co. began to turn away from the window. Cora Grandways, the spitfire of the Fourth Form at Morcove, had forfeited a thousand times over all claim upon the chums' toleration.

Cora, however, meant to have a few words with them.

"Hallo, Study 12! How's the Form captain?" the girl cried out loudly, in a mocking voice. "I've seen the bills about, and you can expect me to-night—of course! He, he, he!"

It meant that they could expect her to be a derisive member of the audience, doing her best to make a fiasco of the concert. The chums, however, were not going to look dismayed.

"The more the merrier," was Polly's serene response. "We only wish, in one respect, there would be a hundred more like you!"

"Oh, and why?" bridled up Cora.

But Polly was not going to say why. She only laughed, feeling perfectly sure that when the bag went round Cora would want to show off by putting in paper money. The Grandways were such ones for making a show with their money—all except Judith, who had long since become a girl of splendid qualities.

"Where is your sister Judith?" Betty asked, feeling she would really like to meet that girl. "Are you both staying in Sandmouth with your parents?"

"Oh, dear, no!" Cora said loudly and loftily. "I'm at a country house—the Grange—staying with that girl chum of mine whom you can see in the sidecar. We are having great fun—better than footling away the hols., trying to show people how clever you are!"

"Thank you," said Polly sweetly. "The sort of thing you would say."

"Well, what a lot of conceited rot it is!" Cora said viciously. "You are only thinking of the applause! Where is Miss Redgrave? Give her

my dearest, fondest love, won't you? He, he, he!" And with that jeering remark, implying how hostile she was to the Form-mistress, she started up the motor-cycle and drove on.

"Bai Jove," sighed Paula, after Cora had gone, "what with Mrs. Juddings, and now Corwa Gwandways, we have wather stwuck it unlucky, geals, what? I shan't be sowwy when we move on to the next town."

"Not a bit of it!" objected stout-hearted Polly. "To-morrow you'll be crowing with delight over the success we have made!"

Paula still looked dubious.

"I don't mind how I cwow to-morrow, Polly deah, so long as I don't cwow when I'm singing to-night!"

Amy Has a Secret.

AT half-past seven that evening a batch of merry-hearted girls came away from No. 12, Channel Terrace, with just one grown-up person in their midst.

"What a rush it has been!" laughed Miss Redgrave. "I do hope we shall be able to start on time! That alleged evening dinner——"

"My gwacious, pway don't wemind me!" sighed Paula. "It has pwoved the finishing stwoke, Miss Wedgway. Pwactically speaking, I am weduced to a nervous weck."

Polly Linton suddenly dashed back up the house-steps to call out gaily:

"Mind you come, Amy! We are sure Mrs. Juddings can spare you!"

Then the madcap of the party ran down the steps again, and took a scampering run to catch up with her chums.

At the same instant Amy, the maid-of-all-work, came to the old-fashioned bow-window of the dining-room to send her wistful gaze after the receding figures of Miss Redgrave and the girls.

It was a glorious evening. The sun was still shining warmly, and the broad parade was again surging with life.

Never before had Amy, in the short time she had been with Mrs. Juddings, stood idle like this, watching the people go by. Even if Mrs. Juddings had not been given to keeping her busy from morning to night, Amy's own willing spirit would never have allowed her to dream away even a minute. But now——

She felt she simply must watch the schoolgirls as long as they remained in sight. When they were in the house, she could not keep her eyes off them. So awfully good-hearted and friendly they had shown themselves to be, and then again, what a sort of thrill it gave one, to notice how nicely they dressed.

A minute since she had seen them leave the house, wearing dainty cloaks of soft material over the pierrette frocks in which they were to appear before the public as the modest little concert party that hoped to earn money for the hospital.

"They must all belong to wealthy homes," was Amy's musing thought, as she still kept the dainty figures in sight from the bow-window. "Yet they don't swank a bit. Ah, no, they are not like that! How I shall love slipping out presently, just to see a part of their per——"

"Amy! Now, what are you standing in a dream for, there?" was the sudden upbraiding cry that made the hard-worked girl face round sharply. "Do get a move on, gel!"



A REBUFF FOR CORA. "Are you wishing to speak to me?" asked Cora of the girl who had plucked her sleeve. "I'm not," was the reply. "I'm only wishing you two girls will hold your tongues and let others enjoy the show!"

"Yes, Mrs. Juddings. I—I was only——"

"As if there isn't enough for you to do, my gel, with them eight young ladies staying in the house! Besides, I want you to hurry up and get finished down in the kitchen by eight o'clock. There's folk coming to see you!"

Amy stood halted in amazement on her way back to the half-cleared dinner-table.

"Coming to see me, Mrs. Juddings!"

"Yes, Amy. You remember—of course you do!—the parties that took the Grange a couple of months ago, when the owners went abroad? Well, they are coming here at eight o'clock to——"

"Not to ask me to go back!" burst from Amy, whilst she looked quite frightened—desperate. "Mrs. Juddings, you know I couldn't go on there any longer, and that's why I ran away and came to you! They—there is something about those people——"

"Rubbish! I only wish I had let myself be took on by them, instead of thinking I'd strike out for myself and make my fortune with this boarding-house!" Mrs. Juddings exclaimed testily.

"No! You have had no experience with them!" the girl struck in tensely. "I have! Oh, why are they coming here to see me? Yet I can guess! It must be because they want to get me to tell them——"

"Tell them what, then?" came eagerly from Mrs. Juddings. "I don't know what their game is. I only know they've just wired to me, to see that you are kep' indoors this evening, agenst their coming."

"But I don't want to meet them—I can't, I won't!" was the hard-driven cry that came from the girl. "Oh, Mrs. Juddings, mayn't I go out, after all, to see the concert, as you as good as said

I might in front of the young ladies? Do let me—do!"

"No, you won't, my gel, so don't keep on!" Mrs. Juddings answered, looking as if she was hardening her heart. "This telegram I've had—it hadn't come when I said you might go. It elters every-thing."

"Mrs. Juddings——"

"You'll stop in, and you'll make yourself presentable!" commanded the ex-cook at the Grange. "You silly gel, you, there may be somethink in this for both of us! And yet you want to go frivolling your time away at concert parties!"

There was a tell-tale look of resolution in Amy's pale face as she suddenly hurried on with the clearing away, without saying any more.

It was hateful to her to show defiance to the woman who was now her mistress; but still more hateful was the idea of staying within doors, to be interviewed by the present tenants of the Grange. She knew them! She knew, too, just what they wanted—only too well, she knew!

"And they just shan't get it out of me—no, no, never!" was the passionate whisper she gave when she was alone in the basement kitchen. "Oh, if only I had parents to go home to, or friends, to advise me! But I wouldn't be here to-night if it hadn't been that Mrs. Juddings was the only person I could go to when I left the Grange."

Whilst other thoughts as painful as these followed in her brain, she was never at a standstill in the kitchen. With a feverish haste she got on with the washing-up, and tidied the sink, and then put the dishes in the racks. Her mind was made up. At the first warning that those odious people were here, she would be off out of the house!

There would be no need for her to go up to her attic-room to dress for out-of-doors. She had her outdoor things down here, hanging behind the kitchen door. And so, if those people did——

Hark! There they were! In a fine car that was pulling up opposite the street door.

In great agitation Amy reached down her outdoor things and put them on, whilst she heard a lady and gentleman mount the concrete steps above the old-fashioned area to the front door.

They were laughing as they talked together, as if the intended interview was going to be a joke. Yet Amy was well aware that beneath that affected levity there must lie villainy of the deepest kind.

"Amy! Now, Amy, come up; do you hear me?" yelled down Mrs. Juddings a few moments later.

There was no response. Amy had already slipped out by the kitchen door, in the area, and had raced up the steep steps, to dart across the road and mingle with the crowds on the asphalt parade.

Mrs. Juddings, failing to get an answer from the basement kitchen, turned back to where she had left the lady and gentleman standing in the shabby hall.

"I do believe the young monkey has gone out, arter all. If she has, I'll give it to her by-and-by. But just a moment, Mr. Dillon—just a moment, ma'am. She may be only skulking down there."

Left to themselves again, Mr. and Mrs. Rupert Dillon looked at each other in undisguised anger. They were a handsome couple, but neither husband nor wife had those looks which are engaging. He was too sleek to seem trustworthy. Perhaps she, beautifully dressed as she was, would have been thought fascinating by some people. Amy's belief had been that the woman

could be as fierce and cruel as a tigress when roused.

"If the little minx has dodged us!" said this tall, slim woman, her eyes agleam.

"Ay, well," muttered her husband. "She may do that once; she can't keep on doing it. And if persuasion won't answer—" A curious smile completed the sinister phrase.

Mrs. Juddings came back, testily announcing that the girl must have bolted from the house on purpose to avoid the interview.

"But she'll come back! Oh, she can't have run away proper, like she did from you!" the ex-cook said, with an air of being ready to fawn on these wealthy people. "I've often wondered why it was she did throw up her place with you. I'm sure you must ha' done your best for her!"

"The girl had everything she needed to make her happy," replied handsome Mrs. Dillon, advancing into the room that Mrs. Juddings had indicated. "It was a pure delusion on her part to get the idea that we—well, we were not honest people. Rupert," she addressed her frowning husband, "what had we better do about it now?"

"If there's anythink I can do, I'm sure, sir—"

"You'll help us, eh?" the man interrupted, whilst he gave Mrs. Juddings another shrewd look. "Not doing too well with this boarding-house, eh?"

"Doing well, sir! Except for a few schoolgels that'll be gone in a day or two I'm doing nothing. I only wish I'd never took on the place, but had been able to do for you at the Grange."

"Um! Well, we are suited, as it happens. Besides, you couldn't make another change at once. But I tell you what, Mrs. Juddings," Rupert Dillon continued, closing the door cautiously, "my wife and I might make it worth your while—"

"Well worth your while, Mrs. Juddings," put in Mrs. Dillon, with her dazzling smile.

"To do what, sir—ma'am? I'm sure if there's anythink—"

"There is this, my good woman," the man said, in a low and impressive tone. "You can sec to it that the girl, Amy Ashdown, remains here with you, and that we get her to tell us just what we want to know."

Mrs. Dillon drew closer to join in the beguiling talk.

"She need not know that you are in our pay, Mrs. Juddings. And, of course, the next time we shall take her by surprise. You understand? A little arrangement between you and—"

"Oh, yes, ma'am; I quite understand all that. Might I ask, then, ma'am, what it is you want the girl to tell you? I mean to say, it's so—so strange. Grand folks like you having to come seeking a more orphan girl that was in service to you, to get her to tell you—"

"What that girl has got to tell us need not concern you, Mrs. Juddings," interrupted Rupert Dillon, whilst he excited a covetous gleam in the woman's eyes by taking a wad of currency notes from a wallet. "Let this five pounds repay you for all you are asked to do at present."

"Although there may be more to do by-and-by—if the girl is obstinate—and more money for it," was Mrs. Dillon's low rejoinder. "Isn't that so, Rupert?"

He nodded, and could afford to smile in a

gratified way as he saw how readily Mrs. Juddings had risen to the bait. The woman was on their side now—in their pay.

"An easy person to handle, Laura," he remarked to his stylish wife when they were going off in the car a few minutes later. "And supposing we do have to tip her rather liberally from time to time—what is a few pounds, in the long run, when such a great prize is to be won?"

Mrs. Dillon nodded her handsome head, but did not answer. She was suddenly giving her attention to two girls who were leaving a motorcycle and sidecar at the kerb that they might join a crowd which was collecting at the parade railings.

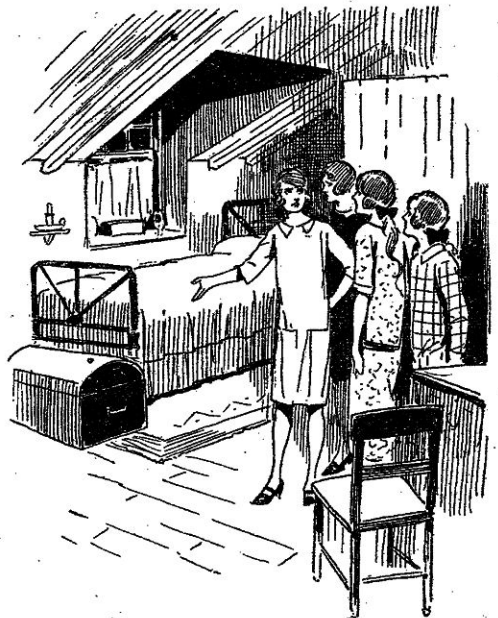
"There is our Laura, Rupert," murmured Mrs. Dillon, implying the daughter who was named after her. "She and her friend, Cora Grandways. They are going to attend that sea-shore concert, as they spoke of doing."

"The concert! I wonder," he exclaimed, "if that young Amy can be found amongst the audience? If so, we might stop the car, and—no, better not, perhaps."

"It would never do," said his wife. "No, Rupert, we must be patient. Nothing would be more fatal to our plan than for outsiders to find that the girl had reason to mistrust us. She shall be given a little time, and then—if she is still as stubborn as ever—"

The hard voice broke off there, but plainly enough the hard eyes said the rest.

At that moment Mrs. Dillon looked as if she would be a ruthless person to Amy Ashdown if—the need should arise for desperate measures to be adopted against that plucky little soul.



PROOF POSITIVE! "There you are!" Betty commented as the girls gazed around the humble room. "Amy's belongings are still here! Then how can she have gone off on her own accord?"

The First Concert.

"OH, won't they be proud of themselves—drawing a crowd like this!"

It was Cora Grandways who made the jeering remark, as she and her holiday crony, the girl Laura Dillon, advanced to where some hundreds of people were gathered on the parade, all crowding as close as possible to the iron railings so as to be able to look down on to the sea-shore platform.

As many people again were assembled on the sands in front of the Morcovians' little stage, which had been made to look very attractive with flags and bunting and Chinese lanterns.

Row behind row the youngsters in the audience had squatted in semi-circles on the warm, dry sand, then came quite a big array of iron chairs that the borough council had courteously loaned the enterprising schoolgirls.

Not one of these seats was vacant now, whilst close behind crowded all the folk who were going to stand throughout the performance, and yet drop a liberal half-crown into the bag!

Cora Grandways, always the one to do her utmost to make a stir in public, was not slow about working her way to the front of the crowd "upstairs." Laura Dillon wormed in after her, and there they stood, intending to be very free in their comments on the show.

Laura was a girl after Cora's own heart, and as soon as she had been told of the standing enmity between Cora and the other Morcove girls, she had been all for taking a hand at upsetting the performance if possible.

"It's such piffing nonsense, you know," Cora said, with a curled lip. "I was saying, Laura, dear"—and, of course, Cora was saying it again for the benefit of people round about—"I am at the school these girls belong to. They are always doing something to show off."

"We had a lot like that at my school," was Laura's scornful response. "The sort that are teachers' favourites. Horrid little prigs I always called them. Well, aren't these girls going to make a start? It's eight o'clock!"

Laura showily consulted her gold wrist-watch as she made this remark. Both she and Cora were expensively dressed, and undoubtedly they looked very charming. Already, however, people close at hand were giving signs that they would have taken to the pretty pair better if there had been less swagger about them.

"Shan't hang about much longer," grumbled Cora, and she started some impatient hand-clapping, hoping to get it taken up by the crowd.

But it so happened that at that very instant Madge Minden came round from behind the screen to take her seat at the piano, so Cora's ill-natured handclapping was soon drowned in a very hearty burst of applause.

"That's Madge Minden—awful swank over her playing," Cora shrieked at Laura, above the prolonged handclapping. "Fancies herself no end!"

Those round about who heard must have thought differently as they saw how unaffectedly Madge took her seat and tried the piano with a chord or so. As the handclapping still went on, she simply had to get up and bow, but it was done with a sober dignity that won the hearts of the audience.

Then the Fourth Form's musical genius crashed out the spirited melody which was to play on her chums. A bar or so was heard, but no more. After that it was another storm of applause as

six girls ran out and lined up to give their opening chorus.

There were yells of laughter, too, as well as deafening "Bravos!" when one girl was seen to be as black as a goliwog, whilst another—a very elegant young lady—suddenly rushed off the stage as if to do her hair. Paula, as she made that precipitate exit, was putting up a hand to her pretty tresses as if they might come off.

All the same, most of the short opening chorus was taken in by the audience, who applauded all the more because it was obviously the girls' own clever composition. It wittily and cleverly explained the object of the concert, and how nervous they all felt.

"Nervous—what rot!" Cora shrieked into Laura's ear, whilst the second verse was being rattled off. "They have all the nerve in the—"

A sudden plucking at Cora's elbow made her turn and look down her nose at the very short, plainly dressed girl.

"Are you wishing to speak to me?"

"I'm not, miss; I'm only wishing you two girls would either hold your tongues or go away. Some of us want to enjoy the show, even if you don't!"

This was the signal for a lot of laughter and loud comments, all directed against the obnoxious couple, and Betty and the rest who were singing could tell that a disturbance had broken out in that part of the audience.

They carried on, however, encouraged by the unmistakable signs of pleasure that were being given. And then Paula captivated the crowd by rushing on just in time to receive her share of the applause, with a small mirror in one hand and a comb in the other.

"Ha, ha, ha!" pealed children and grown-ups alike. They quite imagined that Paula was intended to be comic—a belief that was deepened when Paula bowed this way and that, giving her fatuous "Haw, haw, haw!" and simpering:

"Thanks, thanks! Yes, wather, what?"

Cora was still looking on with a sour smile when she felt Laura giving her a nudge.

"I say, Cora," came the excited whisper, "that girl Amy Ashdown is in the crowd on the sands!"

"You mean that little skivvy you were telling me about?"

"Yes, Cora. I fancy she must have given my parents the slip. They will be mad about it!"

The Morcove girl merely nodded. A song by Helen Craig had been announced, and she wanted to listen. But Laura was all on the fidget, and she suddenly whispered:

"I'll come back presently, Cora; I'm going down to speak to that Amy!"

"Oh, all right!"

Several people showed their annoyance as Laura pushed clear of the crowd along the parade railings. Helen was singing "Ye Banks and Braes"—perhaps one of the greatest favourites in all the realm of music where a homely audience is concerned.

Descending a flight of steps to the sands, Laura was soon mingling with the crowd in front of the concert platform, and again she annoyed eager listeners by worming her slim person to where Amy was standing. Amy, in her plain workaday clothes, all eyes and ears for the schoolgirl singer, whose sweet voice was so cultured and whose appearance so refined.

Poor Amy Ashdown, what wonder if she was thinking, just then, how fine it would be to belong to a happy home, and to go to a fine school like Morcove. The greatest blessing she had ever

known, as an orphan child, had been to find a kind master and mistress in the owners of the Grange; and now that they had gone abroad, and life was very lonely and difficult.

Suddenly she felt a touch at the elbow, and when she glanced aside there was a shock for her that turned her pale.

The beautiful song seemed to die away upon her ears; she could not return her attention to the schoolgirl singer, but had to stare dismally at this other girl who had claimed her attention.

Laura Dillon—the haughty daughter of that untrustworthy pair who were renting the Grange, furnished; a girl whom Amy had hoped never to see again—was here!

Taken Off Her Guard.

"I WANT to speak to you!" Laura said imperiously. "Come away!"

"But—"

"Come on!"

It was evident that Laura was not going to show any consideration for those round about who wanted silence for the singing. So Amy felt it would be best, for their sakes, to withdraw. With an apologetic look, she extricated herself from the press of people, Laura following, and next minute they were standing alone together by a boat that was drawn up high and dry upon the sands.

"Look here, have you seen my parents?" Laura began in a domineering tone. "You knew they were coming to the boarding-house where you work, to have a talk with you?"

"Yes, but I refused to see them. I—"

"You refused!" Laura retorted scathingly. "What a way for a girl like you to talk! You, a mere servant. All right, my girl, you'll soon be in hot water about this!"

"I don't care. Your parents can do what they like. I am not going to be pestered and bullied into telling them what they want to know!" Amy was on her mettle again. "They have no right to that paper which I hid! They—"

"Shut up, talking so loud!" hissed Laura, with a frightened glance around. "It's as good as saying that my parents are thieves!"

"Well, they are trying to get hold of something that doesn't belong to them, and that's thieving!" Amy said hotly. "I have hidden that paper, and the only persons I will ever give it up to are the owners of the Grange. They are abroad, and if only I knew their address, I would—"

"You are a little donkey, to be so obstinate!" Laura seethed. "Don't you know that my people would make it well worth your while to—"

"No doubt they would; and yet you try to make out that they are honest! Oh, go away; I refuse to argue about it all!"

In sheer disgust, Amy thrust the grandly dressed girl away from her and strode off.

She found herself walking farther away from the seashore concert, instead of returning to it, but it was doubtful if she could enjoy the entertainment now that this upsetting encounter had taken place.

For the moment, at any rate, her pleasure was shattered, and she wandered on along the sands, heaving many a sigh over her worrying thoughts. What a shame it was when sounds were following her that told of the delightful performance which was being given.

She decided to walk off her annoyance by going a few hundred yards along the sands, and then to mount to the parade and return to the crowd at the railings. By so doing, perhaps she would

manage to evade that detestable daughter of the people she mistrusted.

Meantime, however, Laura Dillon rejoined Cora Grandways on the parade, and all further interest in the concert ceased for Cora, when she heard what her holiday crony had to whisper.

"Something you can do for me and my people that will be a rare spree!" Laura guardedly confided to her kindred spirit. "Do come, Cora, and I'll explain!"

They worked their way out of the crowd, just as Betty and the rest, with Madge at the piano, were giving an amusing part-song. It proved what a tremendous attraction the concert had become that the parade, except for the huge crowd that was looking on, seemed to be quite deserted.

"This is the idea!" Laura exclaimed tensely, directly she and Cora were back at the motorcycle and sidecar. "If you can only persuade that girl Amy to let you give her a ride! Cora, can't you ride a little way along the parade—she has gone that way, and will most likely come back—and pretend to be soft of friendly?"

"And supposing she lets me?" asked Cora, with every sign of delight at the bit of mischief. "What do I do with her then?"

Laura's answer was in a whisper that left Cora grinning with malicious delight.

"Lovely!" chuckled the standing enemy of Betty & Co. "I'll do it if only because that Amy is the servant at their boarding-house. All right, I'm off!"

And next second she was astride the saddle, and the machine quietly purred away.

Only a couple of hundred yards did she have to ride along the sea front before she saw a girl who was unmistakably Amy Ashdown thoughtfully sauntering alone along the asphalt. Cora drew in to the kerb, stopped the machine, and swung off.

"Like a ride, would you?" she took Amy by surprise by saying, very sweetly. "I always think it's a pity to do a run round with an empty sidecar when someone like you must be deserving a jaunt. You look so—so tired, you poor thing!"

"I—I am at work all day," said Amy, feeling nothing but grateful to this well-dressed girl for being so thoughtful for others. "It is very kind of you—"

"Not at all! Do come—it will be giving me a bit of pleasure."

"Thank you ever so much, but there is a concert—"

"Oh, see that another evening! Besides, I can just run you once up and down the parade, for a blow. Will you come? Do!"

It seemed churlish to refuse such a friendly offer, and so Amy gave a shy smile of assent and went with this girl who was a total stranger to the waiting machine.

"That's right—you feel comfy like that?" Cora sweetly smiled upon the unsuspecting dupe, as she closed the sidecar door and moved round to bestride the saddle.

"It's fine!" laughed Amy.

"Off we go, then!"

Cora's dainty foot kicked down the starter; the engine sprang to life, and away they went, driving towards the far end of the parade, so as to turn back there—as Amy supposed—and do a complete run along the town's sea front.

But at the end of the parade Cora turned off into roads that had been recently laid out in readiness for building operations. This way and that she kept the machine skimming amongst these

short roads. Then she ran the outfit towards the parade again.

"Now she will take me along the front," thought Amy, and it was towards the parade that Cora went. But it was to a deserted end of it!

What was this, though, that the girl driver was doing now! Suddenly slowing up to a mere crawl, whilst another girl as suddenly dashed out from where she had been hiding behind a pillar-box—and that other girl was Laura Dillon!

"Here, what are you doing?" Amy began to protest agitatedly, as she found Laura Dillon, with a crafty look, boarding the spacious sidecar. "Stop! Let me get out! Stop!"

"Ha, ha, ha! All right, Cora, I'm aboard!" sang out Laura, as she simply flung herself into the sidecar, thus crushing Amy back into the seat. "Drive on—you know where!"

And now the machine dashed away at a great speed, and anyone who had seen the whole thing happen must only have thought that they were three friends having a bit of fun.

To Amy herself, however, the appalling nature of the trap in which she had been caught now stood disclosed.

The two girls were in league with each other, and she was being whirled away like this—to the Grange!

At Their Mercy.

FASTER, and yet faster, the motor-cycle and sidecar raced along, now that the outskirts of the seaside town were left behind and the open country stretched before them.

At this pace, Amy knew, they would be at the Grange within the next few minutes. It was a very lonely old mansion, less than five miles from up-to-date Sandmouth.

In her anger and desperation, the unwilling passenger tried to attract the attention of those few people who were encountered roaming the country roads. But these few folk evidently imagined that all the excited cries and gestures were only the outcome of boisterous spirits. In any case, what could the wayfarers be expected to do, when the machine was going by at something like thirty miles an hour!

A passionate calmness suddenly fell upon the indignant girl.

In the way she pursed her lips there was a sign of the stubborn silence she would preserve, no matter how much they might try to bully her into yielding up the secret that was hers.

For that was the motive behind this sheer kidnapping of her, she was sure. Mr. and Mrs. Dillon had enlisted the aid of their own daughter and this other girl, who was evidently a guest.

Possibly the two girls were regarding it as a harmless prank; but what difference would that make to the victim of this cruel bit of treachery?

On and on! Whirr, whirr, whirr along a last stretch of road that was bounded on either side with cornfields; then a sharp turn to the left into a sort of wide grove of trees, and here was the stately old entrance to the grounds of the Grange.

As they drove in cautiously at the gateway, Laura spoke for the first time since the mad escapade began.

"Not the house, Cora!" she shrilled at the schoolgirl driver, above the noise of the engine.

"Take her round to the old boathouse!"

"Right!"

The boathouse! Amy's heart sank as she heard the words.

It was an old stone building, as substantial as

it was ornamental, at the head of a large lake which adorned the remotest part of the spacious grounds. There was not much chance of escaping from there!

Very massive trees lined the weedgrown track into which the cycle had now been steered, and it seemed to be deep twilight here, with the great branches meeting overhead. Amy had the impulse to start calling for help; but she changed her mind and resolved to save her breath for the desperate tussle in which she would engage both these girls, if they tried to hustle her into the old stone building.

A few moments more and the machine was pulled up abruptly.

Quickly Laura scrambled out of the sidecar and then laid hands upon Amy, whilst Cora swung out of the saddle and darted to her cronies' assistance.

"Come on—ha, ha, ha!" Laura laughed wildly. "You managed beautifully, Cora! Have her out—quick!"

One of them held the sidecar-door wide open, and then between them they dragged the struggling Amy from the light vehicle.

In a moment she was battling desperately to break away from her captors; but it was two to one, and they easily hustled her the few paces to the boathouse door.

The poor girl had always avoided this spot, even in the days when her kind master and mistress were in residence at the Grange. Any lonely building standing at the verge of a lonely lake looks forbidding, and at this moment Amy had all the sensations of a hapless captive being dragged into the gloomiest of stone prisons.

If only someone could know what was being done to her! If only those kind and friendly school-girls could know!

The despairing thought was bringing tears to her eyes as, utterly overpowered, she was bundled through the grim Gothic porch, the two girls blundering in after her.

Then one of them slammed shut the door, and Laura's voice sounded in the darkness.

"Cora, will you stay here with her, and see she doesn't get away? I'll run to the house and tell the mater! She will be glad—grateful to you for the help!"

"Go on, then," approved Cora, in between her gasps for breath. "My word, what a queer place this is, Laura!"

"The very place, and a safe distance from the house," panted Laura Dillon, opening the massive door to let herself out.

Next second she was gone, closing the door behind her, and Amy instantly dashed at the remaining girl and tried to get past her to the door.

"In vain!"

"No, you don't!" was the other's exultant gasp, after they had struggled with each other furiously for a few moments. "I've got you, and I'm not the sort of girl to give in!"

"Neither am I," Amy cried fiercely. "If I can't get away, I won't be made to speak, I warn you! Oh, but how could you take part in a thing like this! It's wrong and wicked—"

"Piffle! Only a joke—"

"No, it is not! Do, do please let me go," Amy implored, standing utterly helpless with both wrists held fast together by relentless hands. "Help, help!"

"I'm sure no one will hear you, so shout away," taunted Cora. "You are a silly duffer to take offence like this! You wanted a ride, and you got one—he, he, he!"

Amy realised by now that this girl had no more

heart than Laura Dillon. To implore pity only meant humiliating oneself in vain.

"Very well, then," the captive exclaimed fiercely. "You will have to suffer along with the others if I make any complaint. If I chose to tell the people at the boarding-house, that young lady, Miss Redgrave, and—"

"Miss Redgrave—bah!" Cora jeered in the darkness. "I am not afraid of Miss Redgrave or any of those precious Morcove girls, not I!"

"You know them!"

"I am a Morcove girl myself," laughed Cora.

"Then I should think you are a disgrace to the school," was Amy's scornful rejoinder. "You have none of their spirit—"

"Oh, that will do!" snapped Cora. "Hark!"

They both heard someone approaching the building at a run. It was the quick light step, not of a girl but a woman, and Amy could only nerve

she drew herself more erect than ever, and answered, her eyes flashing:

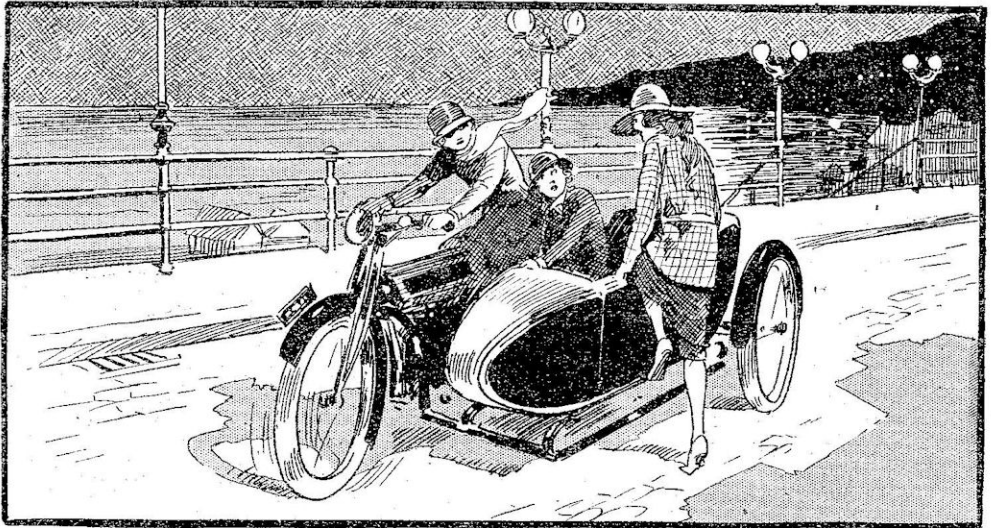
"No! I will not tell you! I refuse, I refuse!"

"Then stay here until you come to your senses," the ruthless woman answered fiercely, backing towards the door. "Come away, Cora. You can be trusted to hold your tongue, I know. Would you allow a mere chit of a scullery girl to defy you?"

"Not likely!" was Cora's harsh reply, as she passed out to where Laura was waiting. "Teach her a lesson, Mrs. Dillon."

"I mean to!" Mrs. Dillon said, taking hold of the door to draw it shut after her. "Remember, Amy Ashdown, no one will wonder what has become of you. I have only to send in a message to Mrs. Juddings, and then—"

The girl, who felt herself to be doomed to she knew not what dreadful fate, made a sudden frantic rush at her captor.



A WELL-LAID SCHEME! Suddenly a girl dashed forward and began to board the spacious sidecar. It was Laura Dillon! Now Amy realised the trap in which she had been caught. Cora Grandways was in league with her enemies!

herself for what was to take place in another moment.

Wide open swung the old oak door, and in the half-light Mrs. Dillon stood revealed, handsome and imperious as ever in her lavish evening gown.

She strode forward, hoping to daunt the defiant girl by a frowning, threatening look. But Amy stood erect and fearless.

"Mrs. Dillon, if you dare to—"

"You will know just how far I will dare to go if you give me any more of your nonsense!" blazed out the woman. "Amy Ashdown, you must know very well that this old boathouse lends itself very well as a prison. You can never break out, and you could yell yourself hoarse without a chance of being heard. Answer at once, then! Are you going to say what you have done with that document?"

"No!"

"I offer you your freedom—some money as well—on the one condition that you will reveal the place where that document was hidden by you before you left my service!"

Amy was quivering with her resolute spirit as

Mrs. Dillon struck out at her, sending her spinning backwards, and then the door slammed shut, and Amy was left in darkness and alone!

What Does It Mean?

BAI Jove, what a wipping success, goals! What a grand beginning! Yes, wathah!"

"Yes, we got a jolly good collection!" was Polly Linton's breezy comment on the evening's takings. "And it did go with such a bang, too! Every turn—"

"Thowoughly appweciated, yes, wather! Goals, I wather fancy people know a wick contwalto when they hear one, what?"

"I zink they wanted me to give ze Desert Dance seex times over," was Naomer's delighted exclamation. "Eet make me love everybodies when they clap and clap and cry 'Braffo!'"

"It makes me love my fellow-creatures," said Helen, "when I see how awfully generous they are over any appeal. Look at all the money we got! And we were only a few schoolgirls, doing things in a very amateurish fashion."

The jubilant talk was at this stage when all

seven of them, with Miss Redgrave, came to the front steps of the boarding-house. It was dark now, the parade showing a pretty string of arc lights the whole length of its extensive front. No. 12, Channel Place, however, was quite the reverse. The front rooms were in complete darkness, and the hall had only a glimmer of gas going.

Mrs. Juddings came shuffling forward as the tired but happy-hearted girls mounted the steps.

"Well, young ladies, an' how did you get on? I s'pose you ain't seen young Amy anywhere about the parade? She's bin out for hours now, and—"

"She was at the concert. We all saw her in the crowd," Betty hastened to say. "But some girl came up to her, and they went away together."

"That was quite early in the evening," chimed in Polly. "We have been wondering if she missed the rest of the show."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mrs. Juddings, and she was looking rather puzzled, uneasy, when there came the loud purr of a motor-cycle as it was run in close to the kerb opposite No. 12 that the rider might pull up there and alight.

The machine had a sidecar attached to it, and the driver was a girl. The chums, suddenly recalling how they had met with Cora Grandways to-day, made a sort of rush to the porch to get a better sight of this new arrival in the lamplight. And it was—Cora!

What did this mean? Surely she could not be in quest of accommodation?

Crowded together stood the chums, as their inveterate enemy at school came briskly up the steps.

With her grand air, she halted at the threshold, and flourished a note that she had whisked from her pocket.

"Mrs. Juddings here?"

"Yes, miss. Here I am, miss," responded the ex-cook, shuffling forward. "For me, is it? Now, I wonder—"

"From Mrs. Dillon."

"Oh, I see! Oh, of course! To be sure."

It was said very flusteredly by Mrs. Juddings, whilst she agitatedly opened the envelope. Moving a step or two, so as to come under the dim gas-burner, she seemed to devour the contents in a moment, and then look more disturbed than ever.

"I—yes, I see, miss. All right! So Amy won't—won't be back to-night. I see. You can tell Mrs. Dillon—er—I shall manage this end, so everything will be all right."

Cora held the woman in too much contempt to condescend an answer. She would have instantly turned round and run down the steps, but Miss Redgrave now exclaimed:

"Cora, the girls told me they had encountered you in Sandmouth. I hope—you are having a nice holiday?"

"Fine time, thanks! Good-night!"

With insolent curttness, the answer was given. Trust Cora never to miss a chance of showing impudence to the forbearing mistress!

She passed back to her famous "outfit," bestrode the saddle, and drove off, the headlamp giving as strong a glare as the biggest touring cars displayed by night.

"One of my scholars, you know," Miss Redgrave thought fit to explain to Mrs. Juddings. "Curious she should be the one to bring you a message—and about Amy, too!"

"Well, yes, miss—yes, so it is curious," assented the landlady, with what seemed to the girls a guilty avoidance of their questioning eyes. "But it's all right. Young Amy, she—she'll be happy, I'm sure! They're such nice people at the Grange!"

Then the girls found themselves looking at one another uneasily, whilst they drifted to the dim-lit stairs to ascend to their various rooms.

There was a thoughtful silence until they had reached an upper landing. Then, as they stood to exchange loving good-nights before dispersing, they began to debate this rather dramatic happening in grave whispers. Miss Redgrave was still downstairs, engaged in talk with the landlady.

"I suppose it is no business of ours," murmured Betty, "but fancy Amy going back to the very situation where she had such an unhappy time before!"

"And so suddenly, too! Why, she was at our concert when it started!" Madge exclaimed tensely. "That doesn't look as if she was thinking of going off to the Grange."

"I wonder if she went of her own free will?" Polly burst out, anticipating the very thing that Tess had been going to say. "That swell girl, Cora's friend, came and tapped her on the shoulder at the concert. Supposing—"

"Sh! Look here," Betty whispered, bringing all their heads closer together, "couldn't we get a look at Amy's room, in the attic? If her things are still there—"

"Come on!" cried Polly, and they all stole up the next flight of stairs, and another after that, reaching an attic landing that was in darkness.

Two doors confronted the girls. They opened one and peered inside, but that room was quite bare, as the light from the parade lamps enabled them to see.

The other room was Amy's, and here again the brilliant electric lights of the parade standards glimmered in at the dormer window, revealing a tidy chamber. The girl's usual belongings were here, arranged with pride and neatness.

"There you are!" Betty commented as they gazed around. "Then how can she have gone off of her own accord?"

"She has not!" Polly said convincingly. "I'll never believe it!"

"Then what does it mean?" questioned Madge gravely. "Good gracious! Has she been dragged back, as it were, to a house that she ran away from because she was being ill-treated?"

"Geals, this is sewious, what? Bai Jove, we ought to find out. Yes, wather."

"We will, too!" was Betty's prompt rejoinder. "That goes without saying!"

And it was well for Amy Ashdown that there were girls here feeling so determined, all at once, to probe the mystery to its depths.

Poor, ill-fated Amy!

Without their aid, what was her suffering likely to be, when she had made it her heroic resolve never to yield up to her ruthless captors the secret that she held?

(END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.)

Well, girls, how do you like this new series? Will Betty & Co. succeed in keeping their resolve, or will Cora Grandways and the Dillons be too much for them? And what about poor Amy, who has so strangely come into the Morcove girls' lives? Another magnificent story of the chums at the seaside awaits you next week. Look out for its title: "The Schoolgirl Pierrettes."