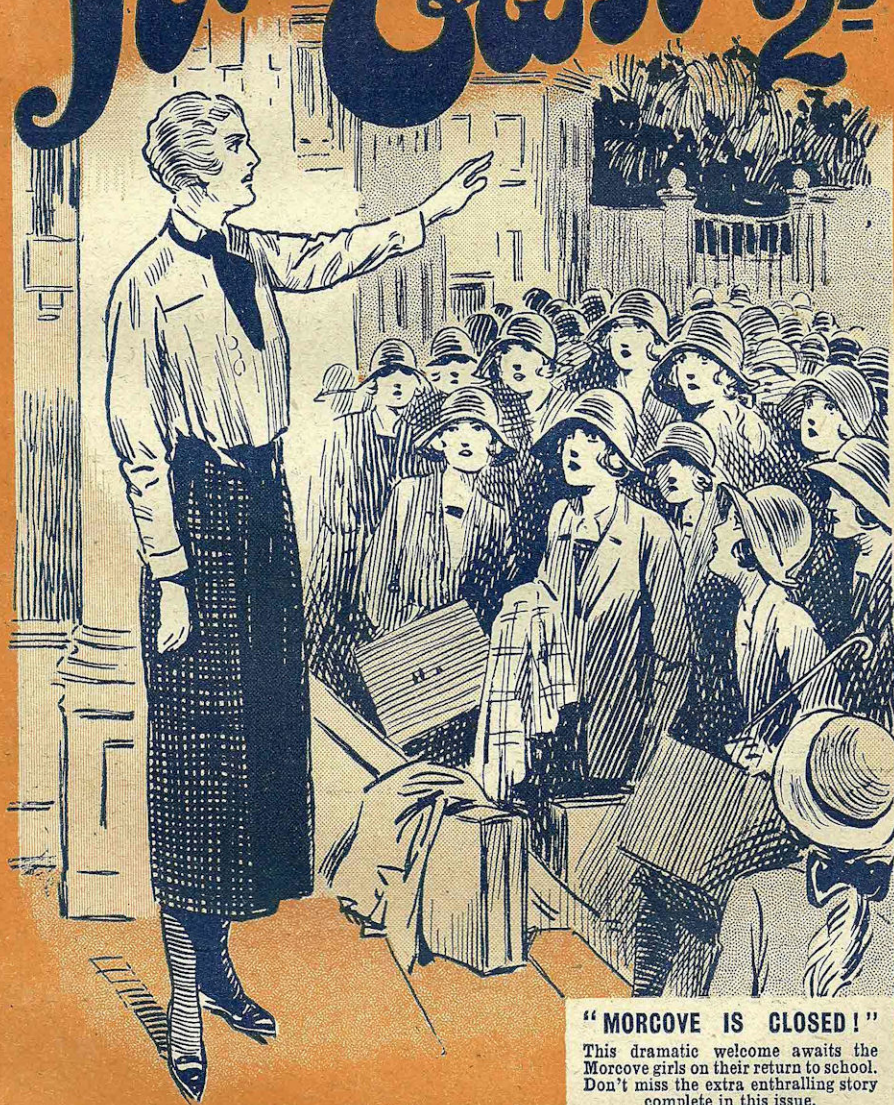


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"MORCOVE IS CLOSED!"

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THE FIRST OF A FINE NEW SERIES OF MORCOVE SCHOOL STORIES.



TURNED OUT OF MORCOVE!



By MARJORIE STANTON.

A huge surprise awaits the Morcove girls on their return from their summer holidays, and you will be enthralled by the dramatic happenings at the old school.

The Surprise of Their Lives.

"SOMEHOW, girls, going back to Morcove seems extra thrilling this time," Polly Linton exclaimed. "I feel very excited—"

"So do I—and I," came from one and another of the girls who were in this particular compartment of the school "special."

"There have been so many rumours," agreed Madge Minden placidly; and Paula Creel instantly echoed:

"Wumours! Bai Jove, yes, wather. One geal has witten to say one thing; anothah, bai Jove, has witten to say just the contwawy to what the othah said, if you gwasp my meaning? So there we are, geals—"

"Where are we? Personally," laughed Polly, "I am just wondering where we are—how we stand—what's going to happen!"

"I can tell you this: we are nearly at Morcove Road station now," was Tess Trelawney's contribution to the chatter, after a glance out of the window. "So it won't be long, now, before we know something definite."

"And what a blessing that will be," sighed Betty. "Every girl in the train seems to have left home, this morning, feeling anxious. May I just have a peep out and see if the school is still there, anyhow!"

"Haw, haw, haw!" was elegant Paula's simpering laugh, as Betty Barton peeped between two other heads from one of the carriage windows. "But, weally, it wather makes one wondah."

"The school is still there, right enough," grinned Polly, "and we'll soon be there, too! Study 12 again, hurrah! Some good hockey this term—"

"Yes, wather, and not so many pwanks, Polly deah, pway wemember. Let me weapat; I do hope and pway that you and Naomer will not, this term, take such delight in making my life a misery."

"Are you spikking about me!" spoke up dusky Naomer Nakara, with a sudden roguish look for Paula that made that fastidious Morcovian quail in her seat. "Eet not my fault eef you are ze duffer—"

"Now, Naomer—"

"And so we have to have ze jape with you, always—like so!" Naomer chuckled, suddenly bouncing out of her own seat on to Paula's lap. "He, he, he, this is very nice; so comfible—"

"Nao—ow! Naomer, get off me, pway! My fwock—you are wumpling it! Ah, dear," lamented long-suffering Paula, as she saw no help for it but to sit nursing Naomer. "Did evah a geal have a life like mine?"

"But I love you so much, you dear duffer!"

"I know you do, Naomer darling; to my sowwow I wealise it, often," sighed Paula. "If only you could be a twife less demonstrwative, dear. If only—"

Zee-ee-pop! went a cork out of a ginger-beer bottle at that instant; and a terrific howl from Paula, as she caught all the froth in her face, would have been heard next door, only there were such yells of laughter, too.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You wudiculous cweature, Polly! Dwoop it! You've dwooned me! My hair, my eyes—"

"Sorry, Paula!"

"Sowwy, bai Jove! But I blame myself," Paula sighed on, whilst Polly set her pretty lips to one of the bottles of ginger pop that had had to be taken on the train, according to tradition. "I should have pweailed upon my pwents to send me to anothah school, yes, wather."

"Where you would have had no Naomer to nurse," Madge said, with a loving look for both girls. "And no Polly to keep things lively—"

"Er, no," admitted Paula.

"And no Study 12 to come along to, after prep, every evening—"

"Twue, Madge deah. There would be that dwawback—"

"With its old armchair, that seems just made for you, Paula!"

"Pewfectly twue, Madge. I do wealise, I—in fact, geals, I fweely want you—"

"There's no school in the land can come near Morcove; isn't that it?" cried Polly. "Good old Morcove!"

"Yes, wather! Haw, haw, haw—"

"Oh, she has stopped crying now, the pretty

dear," was madcap Polly's teasing comment on Paula's sudden return to high spirits. "A health to Morcove, then, Paula darling; take the bottle—"

"Er—"

"Take it; drink to the health of the old school!" insisted the madcap, thrusting the bottle upon the elegant one. "Hold it high in this hand, and say— Oh, sorry! Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly, clumsy duffer!" howled Paula again, as the bottle suddenly dropped, spilling fizzy liquid over her expensive shoes. "Dwop it—"

"I did drop it—"

"Well then, don't dwop it! Do anything, but stop this wuination of my appeawance! Geals, am I or am I not to turn up at the school looking a respectable membah of it?"

"Very well," Polly said, putting on a very solemn air, "I won't speak again. Not a word. If you want to be a misery on re-opening day, be one, Paula!"

This went to Paula's tender heart.

"Who wants to be a misery?" she protested, so pathetically that the others all shrieked again with merriment. "It's not my nature to be a misery! It's you who make me one. My natuwal disposition is to be bwright, agwecable, high-spwited—"

"Anything else?" asked Polly. "Industrious, of course!"

"Yes, wather—"

"And ornamental—"

"Pwecisely!"

"A sheer delight to look at?"

"I twust so, Polly deah."

"Then why do you sit there with your hat all crooked, and your hair—ha, ha, ha!"

"What!" And out came Paula's famous little pocket vanity case, that she might put herself to rights before the train drew up alongside the platform at Morcove Road.

Less than half a minute later the brakes went on, and only a few seconds after that, the train was at a standstill and doors from one end to the other were being flung open.

"At last!" was the general cry, as the dozens of girls boisterously buddled out.

Another comment which was pretty general was that the journey seemed to have taken longer than ever to-day. Was it because the schoolgirl passengers were in such a state of suspense?

"Well, I don't know, everything here seems just the same as usual," Betty Barton was quick to remark, as they all saw the customary crowd of vehicles waiting in the station yard.

The station was only a wayside one, with very little life about it except on those days in the year when Morcove School was either breaking-up or re-assembling. Then, as was the case to-day, numbers of carriages and cars from Barncombe town made themselves available for the mile-and-a-half journey between school and railway.

"Come on, then!" It was like headstrong Polly to urge, starting off for the way out through a wicket-gate. "It does seem just as usual, and so—how funny, all those rumours!"

"Yes! It has been a scare—nothing in it, surely!" Helen Craig predicted, smiling in a relieved way. "Besides, we would have been stopped from coming—"

"Yes, wather! Not so fast, however, geals, pway! I have wather an extwa lot of things to hold, apart from my luggage in the van. Geals—"

"Afternoon, Mr. Monkton!" several of them greeted the fatherly old stationmaster. "Still here, then!"

For there had been a rumour, last term, that Mr. Monkton was going to retire, after many years of service.

"Yes, missies, still here!" was his genial answer. "Not sorry, in a way, either. And here you are again, young ladies, all of you, eh?"

"What about the school—is that still here?" Betty asked half seriously. "Mr. Monkton, have you heard any—any tales going round?"

"About the school, miss? Not I!" was the hearty answer. "Why ever should you all be looking so—so uneasy!"

None of the girls answered him, nor indeed was there a chance to engage him in further talk. He had to hurry away to see about getting the deserted train run off to the siding, for a second special was coming on from Exeter.

"What nonsense it is," Polly laughed, as soon as she and her particular chums had crowded into a roomy motor. "Too bad of whoever it was that started the scare!"

"But don't forget, dear," Betty exclaimed gravely, "Miss Redgrave herself, when she was with us during the hols, said that the Head was having a very worrying time."

"There must have been a lot of exaggeration, though," insisted sanguine Polly. "Half the girls at Waterloo this morning had got the notion, somehow, that the school was not—"

"I say, there was one unusual thing when we got to the station just now," Tess had to strike in, in sudden excitement. "No mistresses there to meet us! As a rule—"

"Yes, wather! Bai Jove, geals, wather we-markable, what? Howevah, we shall soon be theah now!"

Swiftly the laden motor purred along the old familiar highway, soon bringing the gates of Morcove School in sight. Then the chums all laughed as they swung together, the car taking the sharp turn-in at the gateway. Up the drive, after that, with the fine playing-fields and gardens to right and left, whilst the great facade of Morcove School itself now loomed ahead!

"Now then," Polly said, with an anticipatory smile. "To think that in a couple of minutes we can be indoors—upstairs—"

"Yes, wather! Haw, haw, haw!"

"Ooo, yes, I so excited," Naomer said, stamping her feet on the floor of the car. "Queek, queek, he must go queeker!"

"Hallo, though!" And Polly stood up, with the sudden desire to peer ahead. "He's slowing up, when usually—I say! Girls, do look!"

They could easily and safely do so, now that the car was suddenly going at a mere crawling pace. From over the sides, and over the very driver's shoulders, the girls looked ahead towards the schoolhouse, and the sight that met their eyes was an amazing one.

The large gravelled space in front of the porch was teeming with scholars, so that neither the chums' car nor any other vehicle arriving now could possibly get close to the entrance steps. The cars and carriages which had already set down so many scholars were backed on to the grass.

"My goodness!" gasped Polly, exchanging a wondering look with Betty and the rest. "What does it mean? No one seems to be going indoors!"

Then their own car stopped, and there was no need for the driver to call round to them, as

he did, that he could take them no further. They were almost on the edge of the crowd.

Out they jumped, and, after the moment it took to settle for the fare, rushed to join the crowd.

"Hallo, Betty! Hallo, Polly—Paula!" some of their schoolfellows began to greet the new arrivals. "We've been standing here ages—"

"What's the reason, then? What's up?"

"Yes, wather! Geals—"

"Can't say! Nobody knows!"

"Bai Jove! But, my gwacious—"

"What a muddle!" Polly commented, astoundedly. "After a long journey—"

"You're wight, Polly deah. Bai Jove, a cup of tea—I could do with one, yes, wather!"

"Look at all the rest coming up the drive!" Tess was fain to laugh, staring back at the procession of motors which had followed from the station. "How lovely!"

"But—" Betty was breaking out bewilderedly, when the sudden silencing of dozens of voices that had been jabbering away excitedly made her look sharply towards the schoolhouse again.

Next second she and her chums were pressing in closer towards the schoolhouse steps, as people surge close towards an open-air rostrum when the speaker is about to begin some harangue. For the headmistress of Morcove was suddenly standing there at the top of the steps, holding up a hand for silence.

It fell abruptly, that silence—a sudden intense hush, except for the great commotion unavoidably made by the stopped cars on the drive and their hastily-alighting passengers. The girls who formed the crowd about the steps were simply breathless with suspense.

What did it all mean?

In the name of mystery, what was the strange, the incredible state of things, on this re-opening day at Morcove School?

These Girls—who are They?

IN the tone of one whose spirit had been roused by some great hardship, the headmistress sent a cry ringing out from where she stood upon the schoolhouse steps:

"Girls of Morcove School!"

And now every other tongue was still. What had Miss Somerfield to tell them?

"I am so awfully sorry, my dear girls; more grieved than I can ever hope to say," she spoke on emotionally. "You would not be here, at the very portals of your own old school, at this moment, only I have been basely served—oh, disgracefully treated!"

She paused, and they could tell that she was in danger of being quite overcome.

"I would have let you and your parents know in time—would have telegraphed and telephoned to all of you—if I had feared that this was going to happen. There have been threats; there was a time during the holidays when I felt I would have to warn you all—not to come back! Then things became more hopeful. I, and the school governors, had reason to believe that Morcove School would have its re-opening day without a hitch. And now—"

Her voice broke, and suddenly, before all of them, she was wiping tears from her eyes. She, the self-reliant one who had shown, a hundred times over in the past, the great strain to which she could be put, without giving way!

It was a thing that fetched the hearts of Betty & Co., and of all the other girls, into their throats. Their beloved headmistress—oh, what

was her trouble then, that she was in such distress!

"You are wondering about it all, and there is so little I can tell you!" they heard her resume, with a sob in her voice. "Much will come out as time goes on, no doubt. But for the present, girls, all I can say is this. Morcove School does not, cannot admit you to-day! You must not set foot across its threshold, any one of you!"

Astounding, staggering news! An announcement exceeding the very wildest that any of the girls had been led to expect, by reason of the disquieting rumours.

Re-opening day—and Morcove was closed against them, every one!

"Yes, girls," Miss Somerfield spoke on mournfully. "That is the unhappy, the bitter and



THEIR NEW SCHOOL! "Oo-ee, Betty—Polly!" went up the cry from the newly-arrived girls. "What do you think of it? What do you think of our new school?"

humiliating position for all of us. You have come, some of you from a great distance, only to be told that there is no school here for you, no shelter for even half an hour. I did not expect it, as I said just now. I was led to believe—the governors of the school were given to understand—you would, at least, be allowed inside for a few days. But only a couple of hours ago, when it was all too late to put you off, this blow was struck! I may not admit you. Those who say I must not—they have the very law on their side!"

Another great gasp of amazement went through the crowd.

The law itself ordering them to keep out, when surely the law should have been all on their side and the side of those who ran the school!

Miss Somerfield, after wiping tearful eyes again, looked more composed now. She stood before

them with a stern setting of her comely face, the lips in a firm line.

"Well, girls, so much for that!" she suddenly exclaimed, with passionate composure. "The question is, what are you all to do? We may not house one of you—not one! The very outbuildings are closed against you. In one word, we no longer own Morcove School! I and my colleagues—colleagues who have rallied round me as you would expect them to do—"

"Yes, wather!" was Paula's sudden outburst, along with spirited cries to the same effect from all present. "Hurrah, hooway—"

"Morcove for ever!"

"Cheers for Miss Somerfield—hip, hip, hip—"

"Hurrah!" They gave the encouraging cheer lustily. And again and again—"Hurrah; hip, hip, hurrah!"

But afterwards they almost wished they had saved their breath. The sudden demonstration of love and loyalty had quite upset their headmistress. It was a full minute before she could proceed.

"The comfort it is to me, my dear girls, to know that you share every bit of my firm determination not to let this quite break our spirit!" she resumed at last. "I was going to tell you what we propose doing in this great and grave emergency. Listen, girls, and I will tell you now."

There was no question about their being ready to listen. How they strained their ears!

"We are such a vast multitude, some it is certain will have to go home. Others, most likely, will be ordered to return now that the news has been sent to all your parents. But I and my colleagues hope that at least a nucleus of the school may be kept going. Or are we to give up in despair, and so let the name of Morcove School, with all its great traditions, become extinct?"

"No, no—never!" went up the emphatic cry from the girls.

"We'll manage!" That was Betty's own spirited cry, drawing a beaming: "Yes, wather!" from Paula.

"Most fortunately," Miss Somerfield went on, in a greatly heartened way, "we can have recourse to a certain large house in the neighbourhood that will accommodate some of you for the present. Conditions will be rough; but the consolation will be, girls—Morcove as a school will still be kept going!"

Again a ringing cheer, some of the girls looking quite wild with this spirited resolve to keep the school going.

"Round at the back of this schoolhouse I have made hurried arrangements for tea to be served to you. There, again, it will be a very makeshift affair, girls; but you'll not complain—"

"Not likely, Miss Somerfield! Bravo—"

"Lastly," she made haste to add, so that the applause had to die away sharply, "in a few minutes each Form-mistress will come round, to take the names of girls who volunteer for roughing it, at the temporary school. Let no girl come who is afraid to rough it. Let no girl be thought less of for staying away. And so, my dear girls, run now and get what sort of a tea you can, and just think it over!"

There was very little rushing away to where the headmistress had said tea would be dispensed, in the open air. The whole crowd of scholars, after standing to give cheer upon cheer, very slowly dispersed. And every lip seemed to be emitting the excitable exclamation:

"Shall you go? I mean to! But how amazing it all is!"

"Yes, and even now we are all in the dark as to why—why!" was Polly's blank cry, as she and others of the Study 12 coterie walked away at last.

Study 12. Ah, when were they to see the inside of Study 12 again—if ever!

There was its little window, up yonder, with its wonderful view over both sea and country. Study 12, where so often they had worked and gossiped and played together, Betty and the rest. And now—this!

"What must the new girls be thinking of it all!" Madge Minden said in her subdued way.

"Are there any new girls this term?" asked Tess, and Madge answered quietly:

"I have seen two new faces at least—girls of about our age, so perhaps they were to be in our Form. They looked rather like— But see for yourselves, for there they are again!"

A discreet nod came with this last remark of Madge's. She and her chums were just rounding a corner of the schoolhouse, to seek the tea-urns, and here, certainly, were a couple of girls sauntering about who were total strangers to all last term's scholars.

For the moment, Betty & Co. contented themselves with a critical yet inoffensive glance at the newcomers. Madge must have been going to say, just now, that they looked rather like foreign girls, for they certainly had that appearance.

Obviously sisters, with only a year's difference between them, they were very tall for their age, excessively slim and dainty; and proud as they were beautiful.

Perhaps it was only because they felt disgusted at the present state of things; but, as they sauntered about together, they had their heads up and were generally disdainful.

"Well, we can't wonder if they feel a bit put off," Betty murmured ruefully. "It must be a disappointment to them. They may be quite nice girls after all, so shall we try them and see?"

"Yes, wather," approved Paula. "Such pretty geals—bai Jove, they should be quite all right. They know how to dross, geals, what?"

So, without bothering about tea for the moment, the chums worked towards the couple and finally spoke to them.

"Are you coming to get tea along with us?" Betty asked, ingratiatingly. "We hope you will, as it must be awkward for you, as new girls, not to know anyone."

"Especially with things as they are," Polly chimed in, with a rueful grimace. "It's bad enough for us; but for you—new girls—"

"New girls—stupid!" the elder one took the chums aback by exclaiming scornfully. "Do you think we would ever have come to a school like this? You and your school—bah!"

"Besides, there is no school now, is there?" the younger one rejoined, with a laugh of malicious delight. "And how amusing that is—oh, yes, too funny!"

"Indeed?" Betty commented on this deliberate insolence. "You are not new girls, then—and, really, perhaps it is just as well!"

"Yes, wather! Bai Jove—"

"You need not be cheeky!" flared out the elder girl, her eyes flashing. "When you know who we are—"

"Well, who are you?" was Polly's bold challenge. "Since you are nothing to do with Morcove—"

"But we are plenty to do with Morcove, so you see!" the elder said tartly, her words just failing to be fluent English. "As a matter of fact, we are Morcove itself!"

"Now you can have the so-pleasant cup of tea," added the younger girl, throwing back her head as she laughed. "One tin cup amongst the lot of you—ha, ha, ha!"

And they both walked away, quickly controlling their spiteful mirth, so as to appear all airy dignity again.

Polly breathed a "Phew!"

"Bai Jove, yes, wather," sighed Paula. "Anothah remarkable occuwnence, geals, what? But I didn't quite gwasp it, did you—that about their being Morcove itself, bai Jove!"

"Unless they meant that they and their people simply own the place, what else could they mean?" was Betty's stupefied cry. "Yet how can they or anyone else have got possession of the school? Impossible!"

"An hour ago I would have said all the rest was impossible; but it has happened!" was Polly's glum comment. "So, the only thing to do is to cheer up, girls, and get that cup of tea."

"Ah, yes, pwecisely!" approved Paula. "That's one comfowt, bai Jove. Tea, geals—tea, even if it does have to be handed wound in a tin mug!"

And a minute later it was, indeed, an old tin mug that was being raised to Paula's pretty lips!

The Sky their Roof.

THE tea was a very humorous scramble altogether.

Apparently there was a shortage of crockery, due to a lot of it having been packed up along with much other stuff that was to be rushed across to the makeshift school.

Hence the number of picnic-mugs that had been brought into use, and the way in which the few saucers available had also to do duty as plates.

There were a few benches—sufficient for about a quarter of the number of girls who wanted to sit down! But the grass was dry, and it was soon dotted over with groups of squatting scholars. They laughed about their hastily-cut wedges of cake, and the thick slices of bread-and-butter, in between all the excited talk concerning the astounding situation.

"Betty—you're the one I want!"

That was a sudden remark from Miss Redgrave, the youthful mistress of the Fourth Form, as she came to where the Form captain was with her boon companions.

Looking as if she was taking everything very calmly, Miss Redgrave smiled serenely upon the girls.

"I didn't need to ask if you Study 12 chums would want to go across—"

"To the house that is being taken over for a temporary school? Oh, rather, Miss Redgrave. Count me in!" laughed Betty, and the others chorused:

"And me—and me!"

"Haw, haw, haw! Yes, wather! Heah I am, Miss Wedgwave, weady for the fway what?"

"Well then, when you've had your tea—"

"We've finished now!"

"Oh, I see!" Again Miss Redgrave looked amused. "Two of you—but no more, I think, so don't all clamour!—had better get hold of bicycles and go over to our makeshift quarters. This is the house."

So saying, she displayed the section of a local map that gave the Morcove district, and pointed her pencil at one spot where some tiny print gave the words: "Sawnton House."

"Sawnton House!" exclaimed Betty. "We know it!"

"Yes, wather! Geals—"

"It has stood empty for years," broke out Polly, "and it always looks such an awful wreck!"

"The cornfields come right up to the house now, don't they?" was Madge's recollection. "They ploughed-up what used to be a nice private park, during the war, to grow extra corn."

Miss Redgrave nodded.

"That is so, girls, and where you'll get your game of hockey now, I don't know! The most I can say is that the place is habitable. A caretaker has been there for years, keeping it clean and dry, in case the house should sell."

"Good!" Betty said eagerly. "And you want us to go—"

"Only two of you; the rest can be of such help to me, by staying back for a bit," Miss Redgrave hastened to explain. "Study 12! I always know whom to drop upon for any special bit of help."

"Haw, haw, haw!" beamed Paula. "I trust so. Yes, wather! Weal, as soon as I get my hair to wights!"

And out came the everlasting vanity case!

Betty and Polly fell for the special mission that Miss Redgrave had in mind.

"In the Army, you would be what they call the advance party," the youthful mistress jested. "You go in advance to where we are pitching camp—"

"Like the Awabs, yes, wather," Paula commented poetically. "As some Johnny once wrote—but, woeily, I've forgotten the exact quotation! I am sure it would apply, however!"

Polly rognishly shouldered the duffer out of the talk.

"Yes, Miss Redgrave?"

"Well, all you and Betty have to do is to run over on the bikes to Sawnton House, and do as much as you can towards arranging things. You'll see the Fourth Form quarters marked out in chalk upon the doors. Keep your eyes about you, and we others will be along presently."

"Right!" said the Study 12 couple, in one breath, and away they ran to rummage out their bicycles from the perfect tangle of machines that adorned one of the Morcove lawns.

As nearly every scholar had brought a bicycle back with her to-day, and the cycle sheds were barred against them, the effect on that lawn was pretty remarkable!

Betty and Polly, in fact, lost more time than they could well spare, extricating their own particular machines. At last, however, they went riding away with the envious cries of their chums coming after them.

"Three miles, isn't it?" Polly exclaimed, as they pedalled down the drive.

"But such miles!" laughed Betty. "You remember the road, don't you, dear—the hills! It will take us—"

The Form captain had to break off the talk and ride warily with her chum, for a big car was suddenly coming up the drive.

At first, the two girls imagined that this must be some sumptuous car belonging to a Morcove girl's extremely wealthy parents, bringing her to school all the way by road. Then, as the open motor drew nearer, they saw that it held no schoolgirl passenger.

Instead, a lady and gentleman were lounging back in the body of the car, and a very smart chauffeur was driving. The latter was sallow-faced and looked like a foreigner, as did his master and mistress.

Instantly, Betty and Polly were reminded of the two girls who had been so deliberately insolent



NOT UP TO EXPECTATIONS!

"Howwows! Is this to be our bed-room, gals?" gasped Paula. "It is marked 'Fourth Form Dormitory' on the door," replied Betty. "Don't you like it?" "I—er—wealthy, no, I can't say that I do! Not pweicisely," confessed Paula dismally.

just now. They, too, had had this sallow complexion. Were these their parents?

Closely the Study 12 couple studied the man and woman as the car flashed past. The same overbearing manner; the same excessive handsomeness as the girls. These, then, must be the parents!

"And what do they want, I wonder, at a time like this!" was Polly's resentful exclamation. "Oh, Betty, are they the cause of the whole upset?"

"There is no forgetting how those two girls seemed to be gloating over the fix the whole school is in," Betty muttered disgustedly. "It's a queer business, Polly darling!"

"A complete mystery!"

But now they rode out on to the road, and they were all for saving their breath for as fast a ride as it would be safe to undertake.

The way to Barncombe lay to the left, and it was to the right that Betty and Polly had to cycle, to make for Sawnton-House. It meant following a road that was little used, and one that was all the rougher for being so hilly.

Desperately the two girls had to pedal away over the loose surface, now wobbling slowly uphill, and now proceeding very warily down a steep descent. Here and there the road was badly cut up by floods of water that had come down during summer storms.

A lovelier ride, from the point of view of scenery, however, no one could have desired.

From the tops of the hills they had glimpses of the sea. Then, when they were riding along some hollow, the rolling hills lay all around, the steep sides all under cultivation.

Once, a very battered old signpost showed them the half-obliterated words:

"To Sawnton House."

And the tumbledown state of that signpost seemed to witness to the tumbledown state the house itself would be found to be in, when they came to it.

A full half-hour of awkward riding it cost the pair, to come within sight of the lonely mansion. At the first glimpse they both let out sharp laughs. It was so strange to see a house of that size and character, with no spacious grounds around it. There were cultivated fields now, where once a large private park gave dignity to Sawnton House.

"And I was only saying, in the train, some good hockey this term!" Polly cried out, with one of her grimaces. "Why, there won't be room to play even a game of rounders!"

"Are we the first girls to get here?" Betty wondered. "How jolly, if we are!"

No Beating Betty and Co.

DISMOUNTING from their machines, the two chums walked straight in at the open front door, and instantly came upon some of the Morcova staff, fairly up to their eyes in work.

"Hallo, Helen!" they greeted a parlourmaid of whom they were particularly fond. "Any other girls here yet?"

"I think I heard two or three come in and go upstairs," Helen answered. "Isn't this a pickle—such an upset for Miss Somerfield and all you girls!"

"But we are going to stick it, Helen!" smiled Betty.

"Oh, yes, miss. As soon as I heard about it all, I said I did hope there'd be no letting them see we were going to sit down and howl, so to speak."

"Let who see, Helen?" asked Polly.

"Those horrid foreign people—from South America!" Helen said scornfully. "You should have been at the school, as I was, young ladies, when they came again and again during your holidays, to make such scenes."

"There are two girls—"

"A pair of impudent minxes, I call them!" Helen exclaimed again, witheringly. "Treating me as if I were dirt beneath their feet. I nearly boxed their ears!"

"Bravo, Helen," laughed Polly. "I say, if we have a chance presently, we must turn to and help you, down here. But, first of all—"

"Oh yes, I'm sure you have enough to do to look after yourselves," Helen quickly assented, and bustled away.

Then Betty and Polly stood and looked around, and up the dingy staircase.

"Um!" said Polly.

"Not exactly cheerful," grinned Betty. "Still!"

And up the stairs they went, in quest of that part of the rambling old house where they would find the doors chalked:

"Fourth Form."

They found the first door bearing that inscription in what seemed to be a separate wing of the house, lying to the west.

Just there Betty suddenly stopped, exclaiming: "Hallo! We are not going to have this!"

She pointed to another door—opposite the one they had seen chalked "Fourth Form." This one

held the words "Fifth Form," but this was obviously an alteration. A whitish smear on the dark paint told how some previous inscription in chalk had been wiped out.

"That room is meant to be one of ours," Betty said unhesitatingly. "Don't you see, Polly dear? We have evidently had the whole passage set apart for us—"

"And some Fifth Form girls have had the cheek to try and bag one of our rooms! Not likely," Polly said, promptly stepping to the door to rub out the changed inscription. "Let them jolly well keep to their own quarters!"

Betty laughed.

"I wonder; did Miss Redgrave guess that that sort of thing might be tried, and was that why she sent us along, in advance? To see that—"

Sharply breaking off, Betty gave heed to steps and voices that were sounding from close at hand. Next moment, two other Morcovians sauntered round from the landing, chatting together. At sight of Betty and Polly they came out with a very sweet:

"Hallo! So you two have turned up. Looking for the Fourth Form quarters, are you?"

"We've found them," Betty said, somewhat stiffly.

These two Fifth Form girls were only being falsely sweet. They were a couple who had not been long at Morcove, but had gained a great ascendancy over their Form-mates. One was Anna Silke, the other, Millicent Ashwell.

"Yes, some of these rooms are yours," Anna Silke granted, waving a hand towards the corridor. "Don't go in this room; it's one of ours."

"Are you sure?" asked Betty.

"Oh, positive!"

"Because we are not," said the Fourth Form captain. "We are sure, in fact, that that room was set apart for the Fourth!"

"And we mean to have it," Polly rejoined coolly.

Then the two Fifth Form girls looked nasty.

"Don't be silly, you kids. Run away!"

"Oh no," said Betty stoutly. "Not a bit of it. Polly, we'll go in here—"

"You won't!" declared Anna Silke, taking a step to bar the way. "We've seen the Fifth Form rooms; they are not enough, without this one. So—"

"That room goes to the Fourth," insisted Betty. "And so don't be unfair, Anna Silke. You'll only have to give it up—"

"Will we!" that girl laughed, whilst she suddenly turned the key and pocketed it. "First come, first served!"

Thereupon she and Millie Ashwell strolled off by the way they had come, giving amused smiles at the petty triumph.

As for Betty and Polly, it would be idle to deny that they felt humiliated. They had come very near to "going for" the Fifth-Formers, in spite of the superior age and, possibly, strength of those two girls. It had been doing the dignified thing to avoid an unseemly scuffle, but this was a wound to the Study 12 couple's pride, all the same.

Then suddenly Polly had one of her inspirations.

"Of course, it will be all right when reinforcements come up," she grinned. "Meantime—here goes!"

So saying, she snatched up an old bent nail that was lying upon the passage-floor, and was instantly wriggling it into the lock of the door.

Polly achieved her objective with a degree of

success that left her and Betty chuckling. The nail was snugly in the lock, and would take a lot of getting out. Until it did come out, no key could go in to unlock the door!

After that, they inspected the other rooms in the passage, guessing that these were intended to be used as studies. There were only three, so even if only half the Form came along, it was going to be a crush.

Then they went off to seek the sleeping quarters. Hardly had they departed than the two other girls came mincing back. Anna Silke drew the key from her frock pocket and started to fit it in the lock.

"Dash! Bother it, what's happened here, Millie? It won't go in!"

"Won't go in?"

"No!" fumed Anna, losing patience still more, and making a great rattling and scratching. "I did want to bag this room for our two selves, before the crowd turns up. Possession is nine points of the law at a time like this."

"It would have been fun. We would have been near enough to the Fourth to lead them a life."

"Yes, but this lock—"

Rattle, rattle, screech!

"The stupid thing—"

Rattle, scratch, rattle!

"Oh, bother it, there's a nail or something!" was Anna's sudden exasperating discovery, as she put an eye to the keyhole. "I can see it!"



THE HEADMISTRESS'S SECRET!

"My dear girls, I do not wonder that you are curious. But to tell you what is behind all this would be to tell you the story of my life, of years long gone by, and of things— No, I cannot speak of them. They pain me too deeply." The headmistress gave a sigh of distress, and turned away.

"Can you get it out, Anna?"
 "No—bother it! Those girls—hark!"

And what the disgruntled pair heard, as they listened, was a peal of mocking laughter from the couple who had "bested" them after all!

Paula Finds it "Twying."

HALF an hour later, Betty and Polly made their way down through the makeshift schoolhouse at whirlwind speed.

From one of the upper windows they had seen a car coming up the ruinous drive, packed with chums of theirs.

In boisterous fashion the two Fourth-Formers scampered out by the front door, dodging past men who were taking bits of furniture off lorries and carrying them indoors. The rush removal was now going on at top speed.

"Coo-ee, Betty—Polly!" went up the cry of greeting from the newly-arrived girls. "Well, what do you think of it?"

"Yes, bai Jove, pway welieve our anxiety, Betty dear—Polly!" Paula exclaimed anxiously. "We have awwived, don't you know. After a wide that I can only descrive as extremely twying."

"It is such a scream!" sang out Polly, before the car had even stopped. "You never saw such a place!"

"Ah, dear, that sounds pwomising!" sighed Paula. "Naomer darling, pway wemove yourself fwom my lap, that I may get down. Betty dear, any wats?"

"Rats? None as yet."

"Mice, perhaps? You know, geals, I have a wooted objection to wodents of any sort. Even wabbits, yes, wather!"

"Come out of that, and cheer up," laughed Polly, fairly pulling the duffer from the car. "Don't be a misery, Paula!"

"Misewy? Who's a misewy? Bai Jove, though, this is a place, geals!"

"Come and see!" Betty and Polly both entreated all their chums. "It's thrilling!"

They rushed indoors, Polly losing no time in mentioning the disputed room upstairs. The indignation of Paula, Madge, Tess, Helen and Naomer was great, whilst they heartily approved the steps that had been taken to keep out those Fifth-Formers.

"Come along!" Polly cried, suddenly going off at a run for the stairs. "Wait till you see the bed-rooms—ha, ha, ha!"

Paula clutched the banister rail as she followed her high-spirited chums aloft.

"Ah, dear. I have a pwesentiment that this is going to pweecipitate a nervous breakdown, yes, wather. Gwacious, what a gloomy house. I'll not be able to see myself in a glass anywhere!"

Half a minute later, the same elegant young lady was fairly gasping with dismay, as she stood with the others looking into one of the upper rooms.

"Howwows! This to be our bed-woom, geals!"

"It is marked 'Fourth Form Dormitory' on the door," said Betty. "Don't you like it?"

"I—er—wreally, no, I can't say that I do. Not pwecisely," confessed Paula dismally.

"Oh, misery—"

"Who's a misewy?" promptly protested the doleful one. "I am sure I am beawing up bwavely, yes, wather! Consiewing the gwreat stwain; the—effort one's bwain is making, to gwasp the howwible situation—"

"Come and see the studies," Polly urged gaily.

"They are on the same floor as this. Here we are, just round the corner."

Thus, in another moment, they were outside the locked door of the disputed room.

Polly suggested demurely:

"Make a nice substitute for dear old Study 12?"

"It would," agreed Betty. "Just my idea! So, supposing we take it over at once, eh?"

"That," said Polly, "would be splendid."

"Ooo, yes, queek, queek! Ze door—"

"Now then, don't hang around our study," suddenly interrupted the lofty voice of Anna Silke, as she abruptly appeared upon the scene, with Millie Ashwell. "We told you before—"

"Your study, indeed!"

"Yes, ours!"

The chums assumed very good-humoured smiles. At the same time, they gathered round the two Fifth Form girls in a quite affectionate manner. In fact, Betty suddenly embraced Anna, as it were—held her tightly with both arms—whilst Polly just as suddenly hugged Millie.

That Anna and Millie resented this liberty, there is no need to say. In vain, however, they indignantly tried to free themselves. In a flash, Madge was helping Betty to hold Anna, whilst Tess was helping Polly to keep Millie quite helpless!

"Now the key," Betty said calmly,

A hand of hers went into Anna's frock pocket and promptly drew out the key.

Whereupon, Anna and Millie were more or less gently escorted to the stairs, and helped upon their way with a good push apiece!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now, whose is that study, you two?" Polly sang out after the crestfallen couple. "Yours or ours?"

Getting the nail knocked out of the keyhole was no easy task; but at last the chums managed it, thanks to a gimlet borrowed from one of the removal-men. The recaptured key was inserted, the door was flung wide, and into the bare room surged the chums of Study 12, with victorious laughs.

"But we shall have trouble with Anna and that other girl," predicted Polly gaily. "They always have been ones to try and take rises out of us."

"Twouble!" sighed Paula. "Twouble all wound, it seems to me. Call this a study? My gwacious—"

"Oh, you misery—"

"Not at all, Polly dear. Only, where's all the furniture?"

"Coming, duffer," laughed Polly. "Along with all your trunks and portmanteaus. Meantime, look at Naomer, the darling, how content she is?"

Naomer, in fact, had promptly sat down upon the floor, as if prepared to live in quite the Oriental fashion at Sawnton House. Squatting there, with her feet tucked under her, she looked such an adorable little imp that Paula suddenly beamed with delight.

"Haw, haw, haw! All wight, geals, catch me gwumbling, after this! Bai Jove, and here's some furniture being bwrought in already!"

Two or three men who had laboured up to this floor with some of the things now came in for a pleasant surprise. They found that in these nice, smartly-dressed schoolgirls they had very willing helpers.

As fast as the light pieces of furniture were got to that landing, Betty & Co. took them in hand,

and in the midst of this laudable activity Miss Redgrave found the girls, by-and-by.

That young lady had only one remark to make when she saw seven names chalked under one another on a certain door. The room was, she said, the very one that she had wished the chums of Study 12 to have!

Nothing, of course, was said about that attempt to "bag" the room by Anna and Millie. Now that Betty & Co. were installed, they could reckon to defend their own, without troubling Miss Redgrave to uphold their rights.

It was fairly certain, however, that the loss of the room was going to be a sore point with the Fifth Form, and some lively doings were anticipated on that account.

Dusk was deepening into night before the last lorry-load of furniture had been rushed into Sawnton House. For the time being, candles were the only illuminant, and they glimmered feebly everywhere—in the half-arranged rooms, where girls were bustling about; on the landings and in awkward passages, where girls were fitting to and fro, all hurry-scurry.

Candles, too, quaintly lit-up the makeshift dining-hall, when at last the scholars who had been turned out of Morcove were called down to supper.

Last thing of all, candles were in the various bed-rooms that had become "dormis," for the girls to undress by. And what with the poor lighting, and the general mix-up it was, as regards personal belongings, never was there a more laughable experience than these girls had to-night!

By that time, too, some of the candles had burnt down to the sockets of their holders, so that it became a race to get undressed and into bed before the last candle should expire.

This was especially the case in that bed-room which was accommodating the Study 12 coterie. One candle had guttered out as soon as they got to the room, leaving only one other to give a very precarious sort of flare.

"Ah, dear," sighed Paula, as she flusteredly rummaged through a portmanteau for some night-clothes. "Most distressing. Heavens! a zeal to get a wink of sleep, unless—Healp! Where's the candle!"

"Out," came Polly's chuckling answer in the dark. "Ha, ha, ha! Get into bed, duffer—"

"But—! Wheah am I, healp!" howled Paula, stumbling about in the sudden darkness. "Howwows, this is worse than camping out. I'm not undressed yet."

"We are. And in bed, too, isn't it fortunate?" teased Polly. "Shurr, go away! This isn't your bed, Paula!"

"I don't know a scwap where I am," wailed the long suffering one. "Dweadful, dweadful! Bothah those cwuel wetches for turning us out of Morcove!"

There were some sincere "Hear, hears" to that, spoken into the darkness. As Paula confusedly divested herself of her day attire, and dragged from a portmanteau what she felt must be a nightdress, the others talked, as they lay in bed, of the day's strange happenings, and the mystery in it all.

Then, when Paula had sighingly got between the sheets, the door opened and Miss Redgrave came, carrying a lighted candle.

"Everything all right, girls?"

"Splendid, thanks!" was the blithe response from all save Paula, who only groaned. "It is such fun, Miss Redgrave!"

Again Paula groaned.

"Fun! And now—healp! What the goodness? My gwacious—"

"Paula?" Miss Redgrave said, advancing to shine the light upon that hapless scholar. "Whatever are you wearing for a night-dress?"

Then all the other girls saw, and they simply shrieked with laughter.

Paula, whilst in the dark, had scrambled into one of her best party frocks!

"You ridiculous girl," laughed Miss Redgrave. "There, I will leave you this candle, whilst you put on a proper nightdress, Paula. Anything else you girls want, before I say good-night?"

"Yes, please!" spoke up Polly daringly. "We want—we want to know, please, just why we have been turned out of Morcove!"

"Ah, it will be for Miss Somerfield to tell you that," was Miss Redgrave's answer, given with a serious look and a sad shake of the head.

"Good-night, girls! It has been splendid of you to take it all with such courage. Good-night!"

And she was gone, leaving Betty and all of them to lie awake for a long while after that, debating in mystified tones—why, and again why, had they found Morcove School unable to house them any more?

Shaking Down.

ABOUT fifty girls answered roll-call at Sawnton House next morning.

There would have been more, only—the place simply could not hold more!

Of those scholars who had been packed off back to their homes yesterday, or accommodated for the night at hostels in Barncombe, nearly all would have been only too glad to be at Sawnton House.

In other words, those who, like Betty & Co., had been transferred to the makeshift school, so that some nucleus of the famous Morcove might still be kept going, were the envied ones.

Classes that first morning were not to be held. There was far too much arranging still to be done.

At the same time, it was marvellous how quickly some sort of order had been made out of yesterday's chaos. Even fastidious Paula allowed, that the breakfast was "just as good as evah, yes, wather!" And whatever the girls needed for their comfort was now coming forward in excellent style.

But—this barracky old country mansion for a schoolhouse, after Morcove! It was a state of things over which the girls could not get.

An old drawing-room to muster in; a small housekeeper's parlour as one of the so-called classrooms; no playing-field of any sort; no gym!

As for the studies, these were nothing to make a long face about; fine airy rooms that had once been guest-chambers, on the first floor of the mansion. Only the fact that Betty was one of seven girls in her study will tell how packed out they all were in general.

One great blessing was that the chums had not been forced to have amongst them anyone they did not like. Supposing they had had to have Cora Grandways in with them!

For Cora was here—worse luck. She had not been wanted to join the Sawnton House party of Morcovians. Miss Redgrave, indeed, would have ordered Cora to return home, only that would have meant sending Cora's sister Judith home also. So Cora, the scapegrace, had come into Sawnton House under the wing of that sister who was so liked by all.

It was getting on for midday before the girls saw anything of Miss Somerfield. They found her

suddenly in their midst as they were coming out of a downstairs room that was to be used as the Fourth Form class-room. She seemed to be almost dazed after all the worry and upset of yesterday.

Looking at her, the chums thought her hair had whitened a little in the last few weeks.

"Well, girls!" she smiled upon them at last—so tardily, and therefore so differently from the old days. "I hear nothing but good accounts of the way you are all sticking it."

"I should hope you do, Miss Somerfield," was Betty's feeling rejoinder. "We would be a nice lot if we couldn't stand by you at a time like this."

"Yes, wather," Paula chimed in, beaming. "Bai Jove, it would be downwight disgwaceful to gwumble! Catch me gwumblin', anyhow!"

"But, Miss Somerfield," came very wistfully from Madge, "are we never to be told why things are in this strange state? It isn't that we aren't content to struggle on, only that we feel so—so sorry for you."

"Yes, Miss Somerfield!" Helen spoke with equal earnestness. "If we could only know, so that perhaps we could say something that would—would cheer you up! It seems to be a case of cruel persecution. There are people who—"

"Ah, my dear girls, I do not wonder that you are curious. But to tell you what is behind all this would be to tell you the story of my life, of years long gone by, and of things—No, I cannot speak of them. They pain me too deeply!"

Giving a deep sigh after those distressed words, the headmistress walked away with a slow step and bent head. And the chums, as they gazed after her, felt their hearts going out to her more than ever.

Strange—ah, how strange it was, that Morcové's troubles to-day were the sequel to happenings long ago; events in the very youth of this now grey-haired headmistress whom they all loved so greatly!

How had such a thing become possible?

Above all, who were those who seemed to have it in their power to strike at Miss Somerfield, and to keep on striking, whilst none could stay the cruel blows. The governors of the school themselves—helpless!

The chums went up to the room that was Study 12's substitute in this great barrack of a house. There was still plenty to be done. When seven girls have to accommodate themselves in one room, however large and airy that room may be, it takes some skilful arranging.

Nevertheless, the room was already beginning to wear a nice comfortable look. As Paula flopped back into the one easy chair which the study could boast, she beamed with contentment. No grumbling now—oh no!

"I shall have to trouble you to shift from that corner, though," Polly said demurely. "Just while I stand on a chair to hang this pic—Hallo, who's tapping to come in?"

"Come in!" several of them sang out gaily, never expecting to get the surprise that was in store.

For, as the study door opened, who should advance into the room with mincing steps but the two foreign-looking girls of yesterday!

Revenge the Reason.

BETTY and her chums stood agape with amazement, not unmixed with resentment.

After yesterday's experience with these two girls they wanted nothing to do with them. And for what motive, they angrily wondered,

could the two girls wish to speak with them? Was it simply to take delight in mocking at them?

That seemed highly probable, judging from the foreign girls' exultant expressions, even as they entered the room.

Then the elder one spoke, and her tone was as supercilious as could be.

"Aw—good-morning," she said, with a drawl that was entirely different from Paula's. "We were motoring this way in the car, and thought we would look in."

"We didn't imagine you were invited here," Betty said coldly. "You are the daughters of the—the persons we saw in a car at Morcové School yesterday?"

"The persons' were Senor Manuel Lupina and his lady, our mother," the elder girl enlightened the chums, with a very grand air. "You may—aw—have heard the name?"

"No."
"Well, it is one that is well known in London Society," the elder Lupina girl drawled on, whilst she and her sister languidly seated themselves. "You don't see the Society weeklies, or you would have often seen our portraits. We girls had our photographs in one Society journal one week ago."

"Very interesting," Betty said drily. "But you haven't come here to tell us that? We are very busy—"

"You must be," the younger one exclaimed, with a smile that would have been very pretty, only it was so full of malice. "You are—how you call it? All upside down, is that it?"

"We shall manage—"

"Yes, wather!" came from Paula, emphatically, and the two visitors gave the elegant one a second scrutiny. They had already taken particular notice of her as being obviously a very aristocratic girl.

"But you will not like it here?" insinuated the elder Lupina girl, with a rather taunting smile.

"How can you pretend to! My sister and I—her name is Zilla; mine is Jose—we think we ought to take pity on you, so that is why we come."

"I would like to ask," spoke up Madge, in her calm and dignified way, "are Mr. and Mrs. Lupina going to take pity on Miss Somerfield?"

"Just so!" cried Polly fiercely. "For we girls know this much, anyhow; your parents are the cause of all this bother! It's a shame, a disgrace—"

Polly broke off there, for both the other girls had looked simply delighted at this indignant outburst. Zilla Lupina gave a silvery laugh that made her pretty shoulders shake.

"So," smiled Jose Lupina, letting her lovely dark eyes pass from one Morcovian to another, "you do know as much as that, do you! Well, it is quite right. In our country, when we hate, we hate, and enmity lasts as long as life. And this is going to be the revenge which Senor Lupina, our father, promised himself years ago!"

"A vow," Zilla added, with a sudden dark look. "Tell them it was a vow our father made, Jose!"

"To strike at our headmistress?" Betty exclaimed indignantly. "What a cad he must be, then! That is all we can say!"

"Hear, hear," cried Polly, whilst the others all murmured to the same effect, causing both foreign girls to start up from their chairs, bridling with anger.

"You speak like that of Senor Manuel Lupina!" panted Jose. "Take care—"

"We shan't take the least care about what name we find for him, so the best thing you can

do is to go away," Betty said fiercely. "The little you have told us is quite sufficient to show—"

"Yet, wait," Jose Lupina struck in, her lovely face growing sharp with a look of passion, "you may be very glad if we say one thing more before we go—"

"To leave you living like a lot of—how you call it? Savages, yes!" Zilla laughed derisively. "Oh, what a school—ha, ha, ha! I would not be found dead in such a place!"

Then Betty, with her chums' looks urging her to do so, went to the door and held it open.

"What more have you to say?" she panted. "Because we wish to see the back of you! We are not in the mood—"

"Listen, then! This is what we say," Jose Lupina exclaimed, looking as if she expected to achieve a great triumph by what was coming.

others echoing it to the full. "You don't know us girls; you've no idea what we are like in this country, or you would never dare to— Oh, enough has been said—"

"Yes, wather! It weally is—"
"Abominable of you to come here with a hint like that!" Betty rushed on, again throwing the door wide open. "A hint that your horrid father put you up to making, we suppose!"

"That is so—"
"Then you can jolly well clear out of here—go back to your father, and tell him what we called him!" panted Betty. "A cad!"

"A cad, yes!" the chums all voiced together, looking ready to rush at the foreign girls and bundle them out of the room. "And you are as bad, so clear out—"

"Queek—queek, yes, you had better!" was Naomer's own passionate cry, whilst she stamped



LOYAL TO THEIR MISTRESS! "Listen," said Jose Lupina. "You girls can very easily end the misery for yourselves and the misery for your headmistress. You have only to ask for another headmistress to be put in charge of Morcove School." Betty walked to the door, and held it open. "Get out!" she said. "Clear out at once!"

"You girls can perhaps end this ver' easily—the misery for yourselves and the misery for your headmistress."

"End it? How?" came incredulously from several of the chums. "Just tell us, anyhow!"

Both girls re-seated themselves, as if confident there would be a parley, ending in a personal triumph for themselves.

"You have only to do this," Jose Lupina said, with all the fluency that was hers. "Ask for another headmistress to be put in—"

"Another headmistress!" echoed the chums in one breath. "You—oh, the cheek of you! Miss Somerfield to leave? The idea!"

"Yes, she must leave," Jose Lupina nodded with deadly calmness. "Senor Manuel Lupina—he has waited long for his revenge, and he is getting it now. The very laws of your country are on our side! But he will be content if—the headmistress of Morcove School is driven away, and—"

"Disgraceful!" was Betty's infuriated cry, the

and glared at the Lupina girls. "Ah, bah, I de-test you!"

"So?" returned Jose Lupina, getting up to draw herself very erect. "Oh, very well! You refuse?"

"We do!"

"They refuse, Zilla," the elder said, turning to her sister with a smile that showed two rows of lovely teeth. "But only for the present, perhaps. When they have had time to think it over—"

"Never!" the chums cried.

"And to talk about it with other girls—"

"We wouldn't dream of doing any such thing!" Betty assured the couple scornfully. "So just go, both of you, and never show your faces here again!"

"One thing is certain then," Jose said, gliding away to the door with her sister. "You stupid lot of English girls will never show your faces at Morcove School again. You could be out of this in no time; the old school and all the playing-

fields given back to you, everything just as it used to be! But so long as Miss Somerfield is your headmistress—no!”

And Zilla echoed “No!” with the same passionate look of malice as she stepped after her sister.

They passed out, a pair of girls who might be said to be breathlessly beautiful, from head to heel so exquisitely dainty.

They were like the flowers or butterflies of their own foreign country for exotic loveliness. And yet—there was something so noxious about them, the chums felt, even as gorgeous flowers from the tropics may prove so deadly to those who handle them, amiss!

But whether Betty & Co. had handled the pair amiss, they were not going to care. Let them and their father and mother do their worst! That had been the only way to deal with them. Flatly refuse such terms!

“Yes, wather!” breathed Paula, ending the dramatic silence which had followed the couple’s exit from the room. “The idea, bai Jove!”

Madge crossed to the window to open it wider.

“That perfume they fancy—can’t say I liked it, girls, did you?”

“A precious pair, and no mistake,” Polly said disgustedly. “Coming here to hint that if we like to agitate for Miss Somerfield’s removal—the sack for her—”

“The sack, for Miss Somerfield! Our own headmistress all these years—”

“Ah, bah!” exclaimed Naomer, with a scornful gesture. “Let us not zink about it any more, no!”

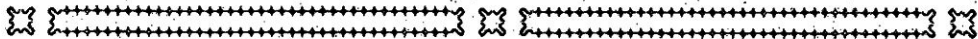
“We will try not to,” Betty said, sighing. “But as for forgetting those girls and their amazing insolence—that we never shall do, I’m sure, even if we never see them again!”

And they were to see them again—ah, how often in the days that lay ahead!

Days of storm and stress for the chums of Study 12, whilst the spirited struggle still went on, the girls rallying round their headmistress with a greater love and devotion than ever, because even the law itself could not end this wicked campaign of revenge!

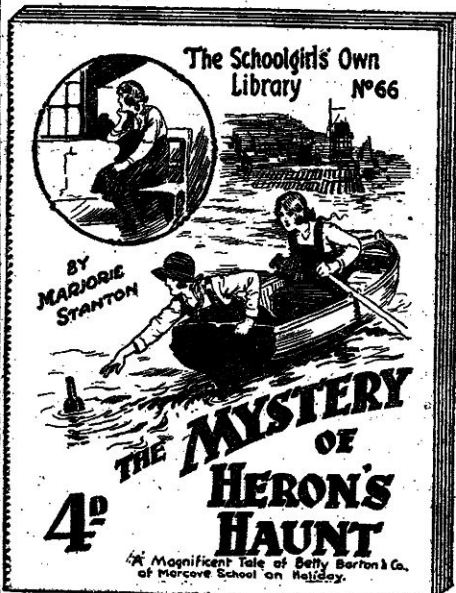
(END OF THIS WEEK’S STORY.)

What is behind all this cruel persecution of Miss Somerfield, and why are the Lupinas so full of hatred towards her? That is a poser which Betty & Co. must face. Tell your chums about this splendid new series of Morcove School tales, the next of which is entitled: “The Make-shift School.” Make sure of reading it by ordering your own copy in advance.

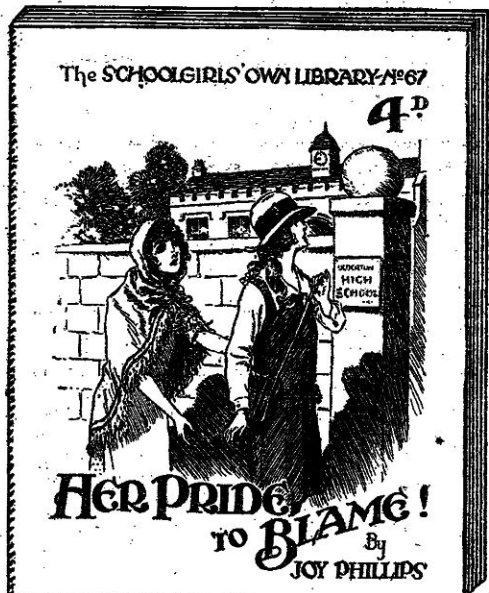


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