

Kable

The Chummy Story Paper Every Schoolgirl Loves!

The Schoolgirl's Own 2^d



"I'M TO BE THE ONLY
BRIDESMAID!"
said Diana.

(See "Out of Favour With the Form"
Inside.)

OUT OF FAVOUR WITH

THE FORM!

By MARJORIE STANTON.



It is a misfortune for the whole Fourth Form that Diana Forbes happens to be a distant cousin of Miss Redgrave's intended husband, because Diana thinks she should be "IT" on the great occasion. It is especially unfortunate for Study 12, as this story will show.

Then, as the fresh arrivals stepped close to that window, Paula and Pam looked at the girls in a rather forlorn manner.

"It's—rather tantalising," smiled Pam.

"Yes, wather; most aggwavating," sighed Paula.

Over the doorway of the high-class shop the words were done in a golden scroll:

Mesdames Fleury and Gownor.
Costumiers.
Dressmakers.

Her Home-to-be!

"GOT all you want, Betty?"

"Yes, thanks, Polly. And you—?"

"I only had to go to the post-office. Where are the others?"

Barncombe's narrow High Street was as quiet as ever this afternoon. Betty Barton and Polly Linton could easily send searching glances a good way up and down the street. Madge Minden could be seen emerging from the music-shop. Then Tess Trelawney came away from the shop which sold artists' materials.

"Only half-past two now!" commented Polly, whilst Madge and Tess were coming along the pavement. "We are not going back to Morcove yet awhile, Betty?"

"Rather not," was the cheery answer. "We may as well get a cup of tea presently."

And then, as Madge and Tess rejoined her and Polly, Betty continued:

"We shall find the others if we go a little way. If not, they'll know where to find us at, say, three o'clock!"

Polly chuckled.

"I shouldn't be surprised if Naomer, for one, and Paula for another, had already turned in at the Creamery! Pam, too, for that matter."

But, although Naomer certainly had a weakness for cream-buns, whilst Paula Creel's fondness for a cup of tea at any time was notorious, Polly's conjecture was amiss.

After she and her chums had strolled a couple of hundred yards along the pavement, often pausing to look in at shop windows, they suddenly came upon Naomer, Paula, and Pam, all eyes for what one very artistic window exhibited.

Naomer looked round, hearing Polly and the others in talk.

"Ooo, queek queek, come and look!"

Polly gazed through the polished glass, behind which several lovely models were on view. The window was not crowded; it showed simply a few exquisite specimens of evening-gowns and frocks for special occasions. And of these, one was a suggestion for a bridesmaid's frock.

"It was to be something like that," murmured Betty, as she also gazed, along with the others. "Only in pale rose."

"Gorjus!" was Naomer's rapturous recollection. "You remember, I was in ze room at school when ze lady came to show the things to Miss Redgrave and—"

"Yes, well," Polly interrupted in a heavy-hearted manner. "Not much use in standing here to— Oh, now I feel furious again!"

"But you mustn't," Pam rallied the one who usually rivalled Naomer for jollity. "Polly, it's no good being cross."

"No, bekas," argued Naomer, "it spoil you for the tea we are going to get presently! Ooo, and did you look in ze Creamery window? They are showing ever such a big wedding-cake. An ee-normous cake!"

"There you go again!" Polly protested grimly. "Always on about the wedding! Ugh! Come away; I don't want to look at bridesmaids' frocks, and be reminded!"

"The funny thing is," Betty laughed rather mirthlessly, "Polly was never going to be a bridesmaid, yet she seems the one who seems most cut up!"

Polly gave a really pettish shrug as she walked on, in company with her chums.

"I was so glad Miss Redgrave had picked some

of you for bridesmaids, and I'm sure the Form was, too. So I can't get over her suddenly telling you that she had changed her mind."

"A most disagreeable webuff, and no mistake," Paula remarked. "I must admit, geals, you could have knocked me down with a feathah—yes, wathah! Howevah—"

"There must have been some good reason," Pam declared soothingly. "I mean, we are not going to feel bitter against Miss Redgrave, are we?"

"Of course not!" was Polly's emphatic answer. "We must wish her well at a time like this. But it's riling that there has been no explanation, all the same, and we can't exactly ask for one!"

"I not see why!" exclaimed Naomer. "I zink the wedding will be a washout if we not look out. At first, everybody was full of eggcitement and joy; now everybody in ze Form not know what the diggings to think! On the day, nobody will have the appetite for the wedding-cake, and that will be a nice thing!"

This aspect of the matter brought feeble smiles to the others' faces. But the chums of Study 12 were not in any real mood for jolking.

A depressing silence fell, as the girls sauntered on. Then they stopped, feeling they had come far enough.

"Still too early for tea," murmured Polly. "Or shall we? Anything you like; I don't care!"

"Paula!" Betty consulted the elegant one.

"Bai Jove, a cup of tea would improve matters, geals. At present my spiwits are weduced to zewo. I harbour no grievance; but to be told one day that one will be a bwidesmaid, bai Jove, and to be told the next that one will not be weduced— It hawdly leaves one cheerful," sighed Paula.

"Just a moment, girls," broke from Pam brightly. "It is only a few minutes' walk from here, isn't it, where Miss Redgrave is going to live after her marriage to Mr. Burnaby? And we haven't seen the house, have we, although we've been told about it?"

"I'm on," Betty assented promptly. "But perhaps—Polly, how do you feel about going to see the house?"

"I'll come, of course! Haven't I said," cried Polly, with more of her usual playful irascibility, "I don't feel put out with Miss Redgrave. I'm pretty sure it's all due to some upset of her own, and so—"

"She is more to be pitied than blamed? It must be something like that," nodded Tess. "She's been nothing like her proper self these last few days!"

"I zink I write to Mr. Burnaby about it all, oo, yes," Naomer suggested quaintly. "Bekas what the diggings the use to get married, if it only make you mis'ble? People have a wedding so as to have ze presents and a wedding-cake, not to have a lot of rows. I shall write to him, you see!"

Meantime, the dusky one very eagerly went with her chums away from the High Street, questing the private road in which Dick Burnaby had bought a house for himself and his intended wife.

The brief, brisk walk brought the juniors to the road—a new one, leading out to the open country. They knew that the house was one at the far end, recently finished, and as yet unnamed. But it had been described to the girls, and so they easily distinguished it. Presently they came to a standstill in front of it, and they were all admiration for its exterior.

Set well back from the roadway, in a large plot of ground, the future home of Mr. and Mrs.

Burnaby was a fair-sized, detached villa, with white walls and brown tiles, and the prettiest casement windows.

"Jolly," murmured Madge. "There are workmen on the premises now, so—"

"Yes, shall we?" came from Pam eagerly.

"Miss Redgrave would never object, if she knew!"

"Object! She'd like us to have a peep, of course—so come on!" cried Polly, and she passed in at the gateway.

The others followed. Wide open to the wintry afternoon sunshine stood the front door, to help give the house an airing, and a very pleasant medley of sound was all the hammering and whistling of carpenters within doors.

Suddenly a white-aproned foreman appeared.

"May we look round?" the girls inquired.

"We are some of Miss Redgrave's scholars."

"Oh, yes, young ladies; that's all right. There have been others here at different times."

Thereupon, like the little women they were, Betty & Co. treated themselves to a good look round, noticing all the latest "gadgets," and admiring such decorations as had been completed.

By degrees the sightseers separated, Naomer, for one, making her way to the kitchen.

To Naomer's amazement, there was no kitchen range, only a very pretty hearth for a maid to sit at during winter evenings.

"What the diggings!" was her staggered comment on what seemed to be a serious oversight.

"They forget to put in a stove to cook ze dinner!"

She rushed to find her chums. Coming upon Paula, she dragged her to the kitchen.

"Queek, look! They not be able to have any dinner!"

"What!"

"They not be able to cook anything at all!"

"Howwows! But surely—"

"Ah, bah, another washout!" Deplored Naomer.

"I zink Miss Redgrave better not get married than come here to live! She will have to live on tin-salmon!"

Fortunately for Naomer's peace of mind, at this point Pam and two or three others came through to the kitchen. Then it was explained to Naomer that a gas-oven had yet to be fitted.

A subsequent sight of the gas range convinced Naomer that Mr. and Mrs. Burnaby need never want for nicely cooked meals.

Of a sudden the chums heard familiar voices. Miss Redgrave and Mr. Burnaby!

The two had evidently come to see how the workmen had been getting on during the last day or two. At present, the future tenants of the house were lingering on the front path, discussing the lay-out of the garden.

Betty & Co. went out to them, confident of a pleasant greeting.

"Good-afternoon!" the girls said in chorus.

"You didn't mind our looking over the house?"

"Not at all," smiled their Form-mistress, whilst Mr. Burnaby's manner would have seemed, to any stranger, cordial enough.

But Betty & Co. had known him to be far different from this—far more friendly. Miss Redgrave, too—there was a subtle difference in her present attitude, from the old, affectionate chumminess to which the juniors were so accustomed.

So the encounter only ended in a kind of painful constraint on both sides. The girls could not endure it, and in a minute they had taken leave of the engaged couple, to walk back to the High Street in deeper gloom than ever.

"Anyone would think we had offended them both!" was Pam's rueful remark at last.

"But how can we have offended them?" cried Polly. "Haven't we shown them we wish them all the best, ever since we first heard about the wedding! The whole Form—what more could it have done? And now," she added testily, "here comes Diana Forbes on her bike, with Eva Merrick and Katey Murray. Expect a grin, girls. Diana's still a bridesmaid, anyhow!"

Sure enough, as that girl and her two companions rode by, the smile for Betty & Co. had a little mockery in it.

Then, when the cyclists had passed, Polly looked at each of her chums in turn, as if to try and tell what they were thinking.

Perhaps Polly felt sure that the others' thoughts were the same as hers. Perhaps, too, she felt that they were thoughts better left unsaid. She herself spoke not a word, and—neither did they!

They Little Know!

"I WAS right, you girls. There are Miss Redgrave and my cousin Dick!"

Diana made the gratified remark, as she and her companion-cyclists came riding up to the front gate of the future home of Mr. and Mrs. Burnaby.

"We'll go in," said Diana, looking very self-important as she hopped down from her machine. "I thought we'd catch them here this afternoon."

Then, with an air of authority, she led Eva and Katey up the path and into the house. They found Miss Redgrave in the drawing-room, standing by whilst Dick Burnaby took some measurements for curtains.

"Hallo!" Diana said familiarly. "Hallo, Dick!"

"Well, Di," he responded, at the same time looking at a tape-measure. "Afternoon, girls."

He added, as Eva and Katey rather hesitantly entered.

"Curtains?" guessed Diana. "What sort are you going to have?"

Miss Redgrave quietly explained that they had not yet made up their minds, but it would be something to tone with the carpet.

"I wouldn't bother a scrap about colour schemes," Diana officiously advised. "Out of date, isn't it? I was in a house last Christmas where they went in for contrasts. Miss Redgrave, you ought to have a direct contrast."

The Form-mistress receiving this unwanted advice in silence, Dick Burnaby said, as he made a note of some measurements:

"Life's full of contrasts, Di, without any need for mixing colours in a room."

"How do you mean, Dick?" asked Diana. She WOULD call him Dick, as if he were a brother, instead of being a mere distant cousin.

"Contrasts in people," he explained affably. "Anyhow, you might let Miss Redgrave please herself. It's what I am going to do," was his delicate rebuke to this officious girl.

Diana laughed. "After all, you may change your mind, Miss Redgrave? Like you did about the bridesmaids? By the way—"

She looked round for Eva and Katey, but they had drifted out of the room.

"Talking of bridesmaids," Diana resumed in a lowered voice, "the two chums who are with me this afternoon—er—"

"Diana," broke out Miss Redgrave, guessing what was coming, "I would much prefer not to discuss the question of my br—"

"But, Miss Redgrave, I only wanted to say this—whilst Dick is with you," persisted the girl who was proof against all rebuffs. "You know very well, Miss Redgrave, Eva and Katey are awfully nice girls!"

"I like to think that every girl in the Form has her good points, Diana. But—"

"They haven't said so, only I'm sure they would love to be bridesmaids. Shall I call them in?"

"Not for me to have anything to say about that matter, Diana."

"But, Miss Redgrave, I don't think you understand! They happen to be girls who are different from lots of others, over the wedding—they don't treat it as a joke, and all that!"

The Form-mistress was showing marvellous patience with this importunate scholar.

"At present, Diana, I will decide nothing about my br—"

"Oh, but you should! Dick? Don't you think that it's a pity?" Diana appealed to him. The fact that he was giving her a rather "fed-up" side glance mattered nothing to her. "Now that Miss Redgrave has decided not to have those other girls, after all—the Study 12 lot—"

"I must correct you, Diana," interposed Miss Redgrave. "The girls chosen by me originally were not a Study 12 lot, as you call them. Etta Hargrove and Dolly Delane are good friends with

The girls gazed regretfully through the window at the bridesmaid's frock. "Ours were to be something like that!" Betty murmured. And now—there were to be no bridesmaid's frocks for any of them!



Betty and others, we know. But to suggest that I favoured Study 12 is not right."

"And, Diana, so long as you harp on about bridesmaids," Dick Burnaby remarked irritably, "this business of the curtains can't be settled."

"Sorry! I only want to advise for the best!" "When we were your age, Di," he said, filling a pipe, "we were told that when our advice was wanted, it would be asked for. You mayn't believe it possible," he said, lighting his pipe, "but Miss Redgrave and I can quite well manage without your aid!"

Diana treated this as playful banter, although Dick's tone had made it clear that the words were a well-deserved, crushing rebuff.

"Oh, nasty!" she pouted. "Well, I'll go and find Eva and Katey, and be off. Ta-ta, Dick, if I don't see you again!"

But this did not mean an immediate departure. During the next five minutes, Miss Redgrave and Dick Burnaby heard Diana taking her friends over other parts of the house, explaining it as if it were HER house!

At last, however, the three girls were gone. Dick Burnaby, still smoking, finished jotting down the measurements. Winding up the tape measure, he met Miss Redgrave's eyes. He and she smiled, but there was some cloud upon their minds, that was evident.

"That Diana," he said, tapping out his pipe. "I don't know how I am going to put up with her for much longer. Your patience is marvellous, Ruth."

"My job at the school has taught me patience, if it has taught me nothing else!" she laughed.

"I bet it has. But Diana— If you ask me, Diana needs squashing. Keeping down. Hard. Keeping on about your bridesmaids! Why can't she be satisfied that she is to be one, anyhow, being a distant relation of mine."

"The girl must mean well, Dick." "Oh, there's no doubt about it, she fancies she has been acting for the best all along! That letter she wrote me—I could tell the thought had never entered her head that I might not be inclined to thank her for it. I haven't thanked her, by the way, and don't intend to!"

He added, with a stern smile: "No, Ruth; the letter may have contained nothing but the truth. You were the best judge of that, and you have since found out that it evidently was the truth. All the same, it had a tale-telling flavour that is the last thing I can stand."

"As to that, Dick," the Form-mistress responded with great earnestness, "I could never have forgiven the girl writing such a letter, only I feel that she did it out of an idea of its being her duty to you."

"And I," he rejoined, "have felt that she was anxious to spare you annoyance and pain. Otherwise—well, you never would have heard about the letter. It would have been torn up and forgotten."

"There it is, then," murmured Miss Redgrave, as if anxious to turn the talk into happier channels. "We must make that allowance for the girl, Dick."

"Since what she wrote has proved to be true, I suppose we must," he sighed. "I don't want to talk about it any more, Ruth. It must have hurt you no end that the very girls you chose for bridesmaids out of the Form should have proved so—disappointing."

To show that he was really done with the sub-

ject now, so painful as it was to both of them, he crossed to the door ready to go and take measurements in some other room. But Miss Redgrave stood, for a few moments longer, in deep thought. "The letter, Dick—I could never have believed it, either. But, as I have been bound to tell you, there were abundant signs, afterwards—proof upon proof. I try not to think too hardly about the girls, now that I know. They are young, and if there is anything to forgive, of course I do forgive it. Let there be nothing between me and them, if possible, to spoil my last few weeks at Morcove School as their mistress and—their friend!"

No Support For Diana!

THAT evening Betty & Co. were bound to feel a bit uncomfortable about attending a Form meeting fixed for six o'clock in the class-room.

It was another meeting in connection with Miss Redgrave's approaching wedding. At the previous gathering it had been resolved that the Form should go into matters a week or so later.

In the interim, much had certainly happened to afford food for debate! The bother of it was that everything was now far from being colour of rose.

The Form was genuinely desirous of achieving practical results by these meetings. All were agreed that every effort must be made to felicitate the Form-mistress over her intending marriage.

But, in the last few days, five girls had been appointed bridesmaids—only to have that appointment cancelled without any reason being given. And one of the girls who had met with this treatment was Betty, the Form captain, and in the chair at that first meeting!

Awkward for Betty this evening! Awkward for Study 12 and the majority of the Form! The meeting was supposed to be going to report progress. But what sort of progress backwards there had been!

It was very heartening to the chums, however, when they got down to the class-room and found so many other girls ready to put the captain in the chair just as usual.

"Chair, Betty—chair!" was the hearty cry. "Go on, and let's make a start!"

But Betty hesitated. Only a girl with a love of power at any price could have taken advantage of such generous clamour. She obtained silence, still holding away from the chair, and spoke.

"It's awfully decent of you, girls, but I don't feel entitled to take the chair. You know why. So please choose someone else—"

"No, no, Betty!" "Yes," she insisted good-humouredly. "Let it be someone who—well, who is not so awkwardly placed."

Then Diana, gesturing for silence—because a lot of talk was starting—boldly spoke out:

"After all, girls, we must study Betty's feelings—"

"Oh, my feelings don't matter!" laughed Betty. "What I am driving at is that possibly there are a few girls who think as I am no longer a bridesmaid it would be rather out of place for me to take charge at this meeting."

Again Diana quelled the clamour by calling out at the top of her voice:

"Better do as Betty says, girls—choose someone

else this time! Look here, I'm to be a bridesmaid. Shall I act?"

Some girls would have felt the silence to be worse than a chorus of "No!" But Diana was not to be back-seated this evening.

"I don't mind being in the chair, just to ob—"

"Well, we do mind!" someone felt justified in saying quite bluntly. "If it's not to be Betty, then we'll have Polly!"

"Hurrah, yes, Polly! Polly! Chair, Polly!"

"Ooo, yes, queek, queek!"

Demurring, she found herself more or less hustled to the position that constituted "chair," namely, the Form-mistress' own desk, in front of the class.

Betty ran out to her, handed her a slip of paper, and had a few words, then returned to her seat. Polly, with an air of meaning business, promptly took the first item on the agenda.

"Wedding present. Helen Craig was to report, I understand?"

So Helen stood up and was received with cheers and handclaps.

"I have pleasure in reporting that the subscriptions to date amount to six pounds seven." Great applause. "Of course, girls, this does not include anything our parents may contribute. Some of you have been bringing me jolly fine donations received from home, and these I am keeping separately."

"Hear, hear!"

"Perhaps we might decide at this meeting," Helen wound up, "whether it is to be one common fund, or whether the Form would prefer to give Miss Redgrave a present on its own account, so that there would be a separate present from parents."

Helen sat down amidst an outburst of cries. The general feeling was certainly in favour of two different funds and presents. Polly found half a dozen girls all speaking at once.

"Whoa!" she requested briskly. "One at a time, please! Shall we hear the captain first?"

"Hear, hear! Betty!" yelled the meeting, to Diana's obvious chagrin.

"If my opinion is wanted," Betty stood up to say with quiet earnestness, "I'm all for separate presents. Somehow, I think it will seem nicer to Miss Redgrave if we give her a little thing bought out of our own pockets. Any present from our parents will be just as nice, too, so—"

"Hear, hear! Agreed! Carried unan!" the meeting dinned at Polly.

But Polly, taking her duties seriously, was more particular. She saw how Diana was looking.

"Diana, are you in favour?"

"I? Oh, never mind me! I'm nobody!"

"Yes, you are," said Polly sweetly. "You're a bridesmaid."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Diana jumped up.

"I'm bothered if I am going to sit here if the chair is to be allowed to poke fun at me!"

"Then don't be rude to the chair," said Pam.

"Hear, hear! Order!"

"You're a lot of—"

"Order! Sit down, Diana!"

"I won't!"

"Then clear out!"

"Yes, that's what you'd like me to do!" she snapped, plumping down into her seat. "All right, I'll have my say in a minute!"

"Meantime," said Polly, "is it the wish of the meeting that a present be decided upon?"

"Bokas," yelled Naomer, jumping up with a bulky stores catalogue flopping between her two hands, "bokas I have some digestions to make, plis, everybody!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Bravo, Naomer!"

Polly would have called Naomer to order, but it was obviously the desire of the meeting to hear the dusky one.

"Wait ze bit," she requested, as the volume flopped this way and that. "I have here a catty-logue showing— Where is he? Where is zat grammyphone? Anyhow, he is a good one, yes! Or saucepans—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Or a silver biscuit-box, with ze patent lock and key. So you can lock him up and nobodies can get up in ze middle of the night to eat ze biscuits. I zink, eef we not choose any of these, we might choose a barometer, to say when he will stop raining, if he ever will, yes?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Diana, amidst all this hilarity, turned to Eva and Katey.

"This is how the Form treats Miss Redgrave's wedding! This is how Polly conducts a meeting!"

"What the diggings!" cried Naomer, closing the catalogue whilst she glared at Diana. "Eef you not like my digestions, find a present yourself!"

And across the room whizzed the bulky catalogue, narrowly missing Diana's head.

Loud cheers!

"We had better hear Diana," Polly said, when the merriment had subsided.

There was not the least doubt that Diana's desire to push herself to the fore over the wedding had proved very trying to the majority of the juniors. Ironical cheers greeted her rising to speak.

Very absurdly, she waited for perfect silence.

"Hush!" pleaded a number of girls facetiously.

"Silence for the bridesmaid. Silence for the bridegroom's second cousin twice removed!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Order!" requested Polly. "Fair play!"

"Have you finished?" Diana at last inquired very loftily. "I am afraid my sense of humour—"

"You haven't any!" cried a voice.

"Order!" repeated Polly firmly. "Do let her speak, girls!"

"Oh, it's all right!" Diana sulkily addressed the chair, quite as if Polly had been encouraging the interruptions. "It takes more than a lot of idiocy to fluster me. I came to the meeting imagining that it would get through some business this time. I took it for granted that Study 12 would hold its tongue for once, considering the snubbing it has received from Miss Redgrave herself."

Diana paused to gather breath now that she found herself being listened to. She seemed oblivious of the fact that girls were bottling up their laughter and exchanging looks that meant: "This is lovely! Let her go on!"

"Er—it's about that business of the bridesmaids that I wish to speak this evening," Diana went on grandly. "As you all know, certain girls who were chosen for bridesmaids have now been told that they won't be wanted. At present I'm the only bridesmaid, and I do think that the Form should consider—er—that's to say—I mean—er—"

Polly gestured for silence quite impressively. She would not think of allowing Diana to be laughed at now, simply on account of a little lack of fluency.

"My meaning is this," Diana resumed. "The Form must be aware that certain girls—not to mention names!—have fallen out of favour with Miss Redgrave. So it seems to me that the Form should take care that further offence is not given. Miss Redgrave is going to be married—"

"Is she really?" exclaimed someone, as if this were surprising news.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Order!" insisted Polly.

"And the Form should do better than make game—"

Sudden uproar!

"Wrong, Diana! Shame! Sit down—"

"Well, all I know is," she shouted, "these meetings have been a farce, so far!"

"No, no!"

"Well, anyhow—"

"Sit down!"

Polly, rapping the desk, pleaded:

"Let her finish, girls, please!"

Diana might have looked grateful for this impartial remark, but she didn't. Ignoring the chair, she continued in a strung-up way:

"I would like to propose that we form a committee of, say, two or three girls."

"Hear, hear!" came the lonely-sounding murmur from Eva Merrick.

"I am sure it will be much better," asserted Diana. "It will get things done and stop all this rotting about."

And with that she sat down.

Paula stood up. So did others. Naomer

—

"Wait ze bit, pls! I zink—"

"Fellah membahs of the—"

"Girls! May I—"

"What the diggings—"

The meeting exploded with laughter again, although it knew that Diana would think such merriment more "playing about."

Polly called upon a girl to speak who did not belong to the Study 12 coterie.

"Ella Elgood!"

"Well, then," burst forth Ella, as soon as the applause had died away, "I would like to say this. Diana is greatly mistaken in thinking that a little fun hinders the real business. She is quite wrong in saying that we have not got on with the doings. Money has been collected, and there you are!"

Loud cheers!

"We don't want committees. We've always found it all right for the whole Form to work with the captain, and why can't we go on like that now?"

Diana sprang up.

"If the Form thinks that the chief business of this wedding affair should be in the hands of girls who have forfeited their appointments as bridesmaids, then I don't!"

"It seems to me," said Polly steadily, "what Diana wants to do is to propose a vote of No-confidence in the captain?"

"And her friends!" Diana nodded fiercely.

"Yes, I do mean that!"

"Then why didn't you say so?" sang out some of the girls.

Polly gestured for silence.

"I will ask for hands up," she said. "Those girls who are in favour of a vote of No-confidence—hands up!"

Diana's hand flashed aloft, so did Eva's. Katey, the third and last girl to make a sign, raised her hand so hesitantly that Polly, gravely counting, paused to ask:

"Is your hand up or down, Katey Murray?"

"Up!" she said, holding it an inch higher.

"Thank you." Roars of laughter greeted this from the chair. "Three votes. I am afraid, Diana," said Polly, "you are in a minority!"

"With you in the chair—of course!"

"Oh, oh! Shame!" the majority stormed.

"And now," resumed Polly serenely, "those in favour of a committee—hands up! One—two—three again. Those not in favour—for we must be serious!"

A forest of hands shot up.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Then Diana got up to leave the meeting. Very grandly she rose from her seat, muttered something to Eva and Katey, and stalked to the door. Eva followed with quite a good show of contempt, but Katey could not help looking as if she felt she was doing the wrong thing.

Near the door, Katey hesitated, and so Polly inquired blandly:

"Going out, or going to stay, Katey?"

"Going!"

"Thank you. Just close the door after you!"

With the remainder of the Form roaring with laughter, Diana came back a stride or two. She looked passionately angry.

"Both Eva and Katey know better than to stay! As my chums, they—"

"Expect to be bridesmaids, quite!" sang out Tess. "We understand!"

"Yes, wather! And, fellow membahs of the Fourth Form," vociferated Paula, now on her feet again, "although I am aware that I come undah the category of a Study 12 geal—"

"Hear, hear!" was the encouraging cry.

"I feel bound to wemawk, bai Jove, that Diana Fowbes has intwoduiced a spiteful element, what? It's twue, there are geals who have been deprived of the honour pweviously given them of being bwidesmaids. I am one of them, yes, wather! But Diana is greatly mistaken if she thinks that, because of that disappointment, we geals have lost heart about the wedding."

Great cheering.

"We geals—I wepeat, geals; we geals—er— Bai Jove, it is extwaordinawly genewous of you geals to cheer like this!" beamed Paula, looking round upon the meeting. "Thanks! Appawntly you do not need to be assured, after all, that Betty and the west of us still bear Miss Wedgwave the vevy gweatest goodwill. So I will sit down—"

"Bekas," shrilled Naomer, jumping on to her seat and waving wildly, "we not going to let the wedding be a washout, no! What the diggings! So three cheers for Polly Linton, for being in the chair and letting Diana say all the nasty things she could!"

"Hear, hear!"

And the cheers were given with great heartiness. Diana now marched out, to overtake Eva and Katey on the way upstairs. Nothing was said until the three had got to their study. Then Diana, after slamming the door, had a reproachful remark for Katey.

"You might have backed me up better than you did, Katey!"

"But— Oh, I don't know!" exclaimed that

girl, flopping down into a chair. "It doesn't look as if it's any use, Diana. You—you'll never do it, never."

"Won't I?" was the retort, given with a fierce laugh. "I made a good start, anyhow—getting Betty and the others the kick as bridesmaids. So just you wait! But perhaps you don't want to be a bridesmaid with me and Eva? Looking like that!"

Katey was silent then. There was a sudden rush of girls along the corridor. They were some of those who had just come away from the meeting, and they were still demonstrating in favour of Study 12. Katey, with her longing to be a bridesmaid all at war with her sense of fair play, towered her eyes and was silent still.

in general had not turned against Betty and the rest in consequence.

Pondering the situation, the officious girl, who was all for being "it" on the great day, felt none too sure of achieving that base ambition.

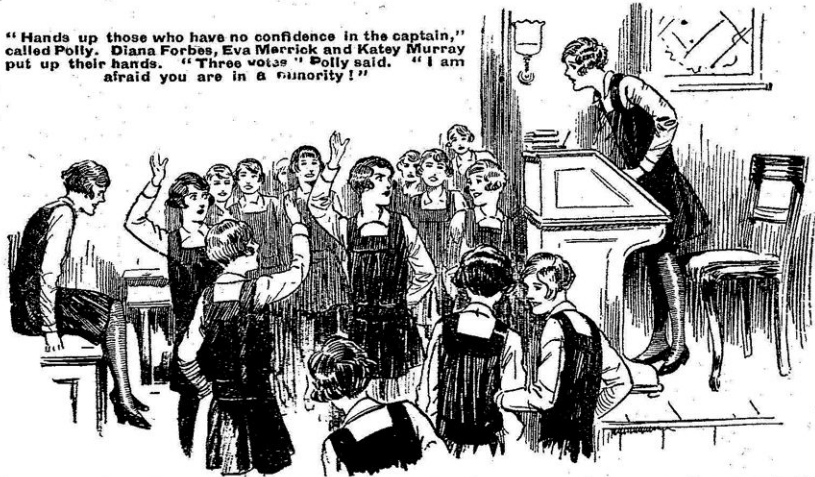
In the end, Diana came to this conclusion. Without delay, she must get the two girls who were HER choice to figure in a very pleasing light to Miss Redgrave.

But how?

It would have to be some action in connection with the approaching wedding—that went without saying.

Then, suddenly, Diana had quite an inspiration. The house in Barncombe, where Miss Redgrave and Mr. Burnaby were to make their home after

"Hands up those who have no confidence in the captain," called Polly. Diana Forbes, Eva Murrick and Katey Murray put up their hands. "Three votes," Polly said. "I am afraid you are in a minority!"



More Harm Than Good!

FAR into the night Diana Forbes lay awake, racking her brains.

She had boasted to Eva and Katey that she would get them named as bridesmaids; but she was really at her wits' ends.

How could she proceed now, so as to ensure the ultimate choice falling upon those two girls, at any rate? Even if Eva and Katey were only picked, along with some others, that would be something to the good. But the real triumph would be the limiting of bridesmaids to Diana herself, and two more—Eva and Katey!

What, then, must the next step be?

Desperately Diana was grappling with that poser.

To herself she was bound to admit that the meeting had not gone in her favour. Anything but! The Form still held its popular members in as much esteem as ever, although they included girls whose appointment as bridesmaids had been cancelled.

Diana had hoped that the Form would feel rather disgusted with Betty and the others, holding that the humiliation must have been well deserved. And, instead, it was looked upon as no disgrace—rather a case for condolence. Miss Redgrave had changed her mind without giving any reason; so, to Diana's annoyance, the girls

the honeymoon; there was the opportunity! Surely she, Diana, along with Eva and Katey, could do some little "labour of love," as people called it, at the house? Or to the garden, perhaps? The house, like all new houses, called for many jobs, and so did the garden. The latter was very much in the rough, and how pleased Miss Redgrave and Dick would be, to find that "good fairies" had been to the place and had got on with very helpful tasks!

But Diana's idea was that she and her study mates would hardly be "good fairies." Those fabled spirits never allowed themselves to be caught over the good work. Diana felt that it would be much better if she and her chosen pair were caught in the act. Then—why, of course, Eva and Katey would promptly be named as bridesmaids! After such a charming incident, how could Miss Redgrave fail to do the nice thing?

"Look here, you two," Diana said to Eva and Katey next morning, "don't get fixing up for next halfer. I shall want you to come out with me for the afternoon."

"There's hockey," Katey remarked rather perplexedly.

"Bother hockey! My idea is very important to both of you, so don't fail me!"

"I'm on," laughed Eva, perhaps guessing that

it was well worth while to fall in with Diana's rather mysterious proposal. But Katey said unasily:

"I hope it isn't anything—"

"Anything what? Oh, Katey, you are a girl!"

"Anything underhand, there!" Katey finished rather desperately. "Because if so, Diana—"

"It's nothing of the sort, so don't worry! Shall I tell you my idea, and then you'll see; it has nothing to do with Betty & Co., if that is what you fear!"

She presented the idea in a very charming light, and Katey's misgivings were promptly dispelled. Katey was quite ready to believe that the "good fairy stunt," as Eva jokingly called it, was not merely perfectly harmless, but very admirable.

From that hour the three girls looked forward to the next halfer. Unfortunately, when at last it came round, it proved a very unpropitious one, as regards weather. After a pouring morning, the afternoon was rough and gloomy. The rain might keep off, and that was as much as could be hoped for.

Hockey and other games had had to be abandoned on account of the state of the ground, so a good many Morecovians were likely to be cycling into Barncombe. Aware of this, Diana got her two study-mates to make an immediate start after dinner. The trio were off upon their cycles whilst other juniors were letting talk and fun run away with the first half-hour.

They reached the house to find not a soul on the premises. Being a Saturday, the carpenters and decorators had knocked off at midday. But the front door was wide open, and upon the bare floor, just past the threshold, was chalked a warning about wet paint.

"Let's see round the garden first," Diana proposed, after they had stood their machines against the front fence.

"Garden!" sniggered Eva. "My word, plenty to be done here before you can call it a garden! Ha, ha!"

"Well, then, let's see what we can do!" was Diana's answer to that. "I wonder if there are garden things in that shed?"

"Sure enough they found some gardening implements. No doubt Mr. Burnaby, at favourable times, was performing his own labours of love about the place. But this afternoon certainly was not favourable to spade work.

"We'll try," said Diana virtuously. "It would be so nice if we could get on with a bit of digging, so that Dick came and found it all done for him!"

They could tell where gravelled paths were going to be laid down and where the rough ground was to be formed into flower borders. At one of these latter places the trio made a start, with simply disastrous results.

Not only did the soil clog spade or fork alike; the girls' clumsy tramping puddled the surface, so that their shoes were soon smothered.

Neither skill nor patience was being shown. In fact, Diana was every bit as out of love with the "labour of love" as were her companions. At the end of five minutes she lost her temper, and began to "dash" everything—the exertion, the mud, the slow progress.

"Oh, let's turn it in and find something to do indoors!" she exclaimed at last, and threw down the garden fork. "This is awful!"

"I don't know that we have exactly improved appearances," grinned Eva.

They certainly had not. Dick Burnaby would

have to be more than human not to lose his temper when next he came to the place.

No sooner were the three girls indoors than Katey, for one, became alarmed at the mud they had brought with them. There was no mat anywhere.

"I say, we are making the floors dirty!"

"Oh, never mind!" Diana said peevishly. "After all, the workmen are— Dash! Here's another door just been painted!"

Wiping painty finger-tips, she led on. A prow round the ground floor, however, left the "good fairies" still at a loss for a job. It was not until they had ventured upstairs that prospects improved. Then the sight of a large, unopened tin of floorstain gave Diana an idea.

"Ah, good! They are going to have this floor stained, girls, so we can do for them! Here's the stuff— Dash, the tin wants opening, though! Eva, I saw a screwdriver on the kitchen mantel-piece. Slip down and get it."

Eva obeyed willingly enough—perhaps too speedily, when there was so much wet paint about. As fast as she whipped painty fingers from one object, she seemed to touch another. Returning with the screwdriver, she thought it best not to mention the little acts of absent-mindedness.

"Now, then, I'll open this tin whilst you two find bits of rag," Diana said domineeringly. "We don't need brushes. They say that rag is just as good to— Dash!" she gasped, as the lid of the tin flew off, slopping varnish stain all over her hand.

"Rag, quick! I can't use my hanky for this! Don't stand there!"

"But—"

"Downstairs!"

This time, both Eva and Katey rushed away. "Mind the paint," Eva said, after she herself had started touching it again. "Oh, bother! What will these doors look like, Katey?"

A minute after this Eva returned alone to waiting Diana.

"I say—"

"Rag, where is it?"

"Katey—she—she's kicked over a tin of paint—"

"What!"

"All over the passage floor outside the kitchen—"

"The silly idiot!" fumed Diana. "That's a nice thing! If I had known you were going to be so clumsy, I wouldn't have— Oh, dash, now you've made me upset the stain!"

"I didn't make you, Di!"

"Well—look at it, anyhow!"

Eva looked at the capsized tin and the lake of stain spreading over the bed-room floor.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Eva, if you can't be sensible—"

"But it's too funny, Di! I say, there will be a row about this," laughed Eva. "They won't thank us, that's certain."

"They mustn't get to know, that's all," muttered Diana, still holding a varnished hand away from her clothes. "We'd best clear out. Come on, downstairs, and then—"

And then Diana took hold of a door, on which the white paint was still wet, with her varnished hand.

"Ugh!" she raged. "Eva, if you don't stop laughing, I'll never speak to you again. Where's Katey?"

They found Katey trying to scoop back a couple of pounds of paint into its tin by means

of a putty-knife, Diana pushed by, anxious to get her hands clean, and then Katey warned her to look out.

"What?"

"You've just trodden in the paint, Di."

"Trodden in— Oh, my goodness!" groaned Diana. "That's your fault, Katey!"

"I like that! Stand still, anyhow!"

Diana, however, had gone wild by now. She rushed away, leaving footprints on the nice new flooring. At the same time, she must have touched walls and doors in twenty different places with that sticky hand of hers. Eva tittered incessantly, Katey looked worried, whilst Diana herself became speechless with rage.

When at last she had got the varnish-stain off her hand—which she did by washing it in "turps"—she flung out of the house, as if done with Eva and Katey for the rest of the afternoon.

Those two girls, passing out to their bicycles, felt none the easier in their minds when they saw that they were in full view of a future neighbour of Mr. and Mrs. Burnaby, as that individual towed a garden roller up and down his front path!

Who Are The Culprits ?

BARELY twenty minutes after that rather panicky flight from the house, three other girls came cycling up to the gate.

They were Betty, Polly and Pam, arriving in some haste, with the hope of finding Miss Redgrave putting in a little time at her future home.

The girls wished to obtain her permission about something. In High Street, they and their chums had encountered some of the Barncombe House girls, who wanted them to come back to that school for tea. If permission could be obtained from Miss Redgrave, Betty & Co. would not need to leave directly after tea.

But now, as the three Study 12 girls reached the wide-set front door of the house, they felt that their luck was out.

"Not here, I'm afraid!" exclaimed Betty, after they had paused to listen. "What a shame! I did think we stood a good chance of catching her."

"There's wet paint, so we had better not go in. Besides, our shoes are none too clean," said Pam. "Shall we give a call, in case she is in one of the back rooms upstairs, doing something?"

So they called "Miss Redgrave!" The cheery hail echoed hollowly in the empty building, and was followed by dead silence.

"No luck," commented Polly. "Oh, well, perhaps we shall come upon her in the town."

"Very likely," was Betty's hopeful remark. "I expect she has a few things to get, and there was nothing to keep her tied to Morcover this afternoon."

They returned to their cycles and rode away, and in another minute all three of them gave the glad exclamation:

"Why, here she is!"

But that gladness was only momentary. Even as the girls hopped down from their machines, to be ready to ask the favour of their Form-mistress, they were seized

with that embarrassment which was the sad outcome of the altered plan as regards bridesmaids.

Nor was Miss Redgrave herself quite the same as of yore to the girls. Once again they sensed a certain constraint on her part, and that, of course, only made them feel more uncomfortable. "Well?" she smiled upon them faintly, after stopping to speak. "What are you doing out this way?"

"We—we've been to the house," Betty explained rather flusteredly. "We thought you might be there—"

"I am on my way there now. But why—"

"Please, Miss Redgrave, we have been asked by Miriam Haste to go to tea at Barncombe House. Could we have permission to— to stay until about six o'clock?" pleaded Betty.

"Oh, yes, certainly; that's all right," was the kindly response. "You'll all be coming back together. I hope you have a nice time. Remember me to your friends at Barncombe House."

"We will, Miss Redgrave—thanks!"

Next second the Study 12 three were riding away in the direction of High Street, whilst Miss Redgrave pedalled along to her future home.

The afternoon had brightened a little, and the brand-new dwelling looked very jolly as viewed from the front gate. On the way to the porch, Miss Redgrave noticed anything but a pleasing development in the unmade garden, where somebody had made an awful hash of a bit of digging. She knew it could not be Dick Burnaby's doing, and she could only suppose that he had given an out-of-work man a job for which he was not qualified!

Then, stepping into the house to take a pleasing wander round, she received a shock.

"Oh clumsy, now you've made me upset the stain!" fumed Diana. "I didn't make you, Di," protested Eva. "But whoever's fault it was, the stain was spilt all over the new floor!"



Newly-painted doors were badly finger-marked. The bare floors, which the workmen themselves had been at pains to keep so clean, were very muddy with fresh mud.

But this was nothing to the shocking discoveries still in store for Miss Redgrave.

She passed through the hall and came upon spilt paint and unsightly marks left by someone who had stepped into the paint. Walls and doors were imprinted with a dark stain. It was as if a small, girlish hand had been dipped in-stain and then pressed here and there.

Miss Redgrave showed a frown of pardonable anger. Already she had come upon disfigurements that meant the entire repainting of certain doors. Hideous dark imprints upon lovely white enamel!

Even now, however, she did not know the worst. It was when she passed upstairs that she came upon a floor slopped over with varnish-stain, and a lot more disfigurements. Here also much of the painting would have to be done all over again.

She studied the fingerprints once more. Undoubtedly a girlish hand had done all this harm. Who then?

She knew that lots of Morcove girls had come to the house to take a look round. They had been welcome to do so. Needless to say, neither she nor Dick Burnaby would have dreamed of resenting such a natural and pleasing interest in their future home. But this—

The damage seemed to be wanton damage. It was impossible to believe that any mishap could have caused such extensive harm, and so it seemed equally impossible that any Morcove girl, after all, could have been responsible for it.

"Done since the workmen left at midday, surely," she deduced. "How glad I am that Dick is up in town this week-end! The men must start in on Monday morning and make good the damage. I wouldn't have Dick see this for worlds!"

Rendered quite sick at heart by her discoveries, she quitted the house, pulling the front door shut after her. It had been right for the workmen to leave it wedged open, but now she was afraid that some mischievous urchin had been up to tricks with the place.

In the act of riding away, she saw a gentleman coming out of his garage on the adjoining property, and so she dismounted.

"Mr. Brownlow—"

"Oh, good afternoon!" he cried genially. "Anything I can do? The wife's indoors, if—"

"You are very kind," Miss Redgrave exclaimed, drawing closer. "I merely wanted to ask: have you seen any children up to mischief over there at the house? Someone has been in marking the wet paint."

"Really? Pity! I went through this morning and thought how fine it was all looking! No, I've seen no one. Three of your girls were along, a while ago, but—"

"Oh, no, those girls could never have done such a thing," smiled Miss Redgrave. "I know the ones you mean; I met them."

"Well, there has been no one else, Miss Redgrave; that I could almost swear. I saw them do a bit of digging—"

"You did?"

"For a few minutes they were at it in the garden, and I was rather surprised. It isn't the weather for digging. But it was no business of mine. Then they went into the house. Won't you go round to my front door and put in half-an-hour with my wife?"

But Miss Redgrave pleaded that she could not stop just then, and the excuse was genuine enough.

She was feeling far too distressed in her mind to be able to make pleasant company for Mr. Brownlow's charming wife. She rode away, working round to the road back to Morcove.

That Betty, Polly and Pam were answerable for the mischief she ruled out altogether. It was unthinkable. But three Morcove girls had been seen digging in the garden, and in their muddy shoes they had afterwards gone into the house. Who were those three? What on earth had been the reason for their behaving so disgracefully?

To the first question, Miss Redgrave felt that perhaps she never would get the answer. But it was not long before she found the only possible answer to that second poser.

Sadly she reached the conclusion that it was another instance of a derivative state of mind about the wedding. She and Dick Burnaby were being made game of, and the "fun" was becoming more and more reckless.

Why it should be so she could not imagine, except that it must be a dislike of her getting married, taking a very freakish turn. Just as sisters of an intending bride were often inclined to give their future brother-in-law an uncomfortable time, so, it seemed, the Form had been seized with desire to tease her and Dick Burnaby.

Back at school, and alone in her private room, she went over in her mind all the evidence there had been of late.

Diana Forbes' letter she would not have deemed trustworthy evidence, only—it had been borne out by personal discoveries. There was that caricature in Tess Trelawney's study, of a bride and bridegroom arm-in-arm. Generally, there had seemed to be a ribald attitude amongst all the Form. And now, to-day, that wanton damage at the house! As if to say: "So much for you and your future home!"

That evening, when she knew that all her scholars were back, the Form-mistress sent for Betty.

"I met you coming away from the house this afternoon, Betty, with Polly and Pam. You had not been inside, I take it?"

"No, Miss Redgrave. We only went to the door and called your name. Finding you were not there, we came away."

There was a pause, Miss Redgrave giving Betty's face a steady scrutiny. The Form-mistress was wondering—had this girl and her two chums seen from the doorstep something of the damage done? Was that why they had all three looked rather uncomfortable at the subsequent encounter in the road?

"I will ask you this, Betty, but don't answer if you would rather not. Do you know of any other girls who went to the house in advance of you, Polly, and Pam?"

"No, Miss Redgrave! Why?"

The Form-mistress did not answer. She told Betty she could go, and in a couple of seconds the girl was gone.

Then, alone once more, Miss Redgrave stood in deep thought.

Never for a moment inclining to the belief that Betty and those two chums of hers were the culprits, she had only wondered if they knew what had been done and were alarmed about it. But it was abundantly clear that Betty had not been shielding anyone just now.

So there it was; nothing to do with those three girls, but three others were the culprits! Would

one ever discover their names? But what did it matter? the sorrowful mistress asked herself. How could one make a scandal of such a misdeed within a few weeks of the wedding?

No! All one could do was to follow up the affair with a dignified action. Since the Form was like this about the approaching wedding, some girls doing one thing and some another, to bring it into derision, the best plan would be to—

A tap at the door interrupted Miss Redgrave's sad thoughts.

"Yes, come in," she responded. "Oh, it's you, Diana! I—"

"May I speak with you for a minute, please?" Diana asked demurely. "I hope you won't mind Miss Redgrave, but have you decided anything yet about the other bridesmaids?"

"No, Diana, I have not. Or, rather," Miss Redgrave corrected herself, becoming tight-lipped, "I have reluctantly come to the conclusion that I will not have—"

"Not have any bridesmaids?" gasped Diana. "Oh, but you must! I'm Dick's cousin; and, besides you must have one bridesmaid at least, to take your bouquet and all that!"

"I was going to say, Diana, I will not have more than one bridesmaid." The Form-mistress's voice sounded a little weary. "In view of things I need not mention—that is my final decision. Just yourself, Diana, as Mr. Burnaby's cousin, and no others."

"Not Eva and Katey, to make it three? Three would be—"

"No, Diana. And please let it rest at that, because—"

"Oh, all right! I don't mind." Of course she didn't! One bridesmaid, and that one her own officious self! "I suppose I may let it be known?"

"If you like, yes. By the way, Diana—"

The girl stopped dead on the way back to the door.

"Did you and some of your friends happen to go to the house in Barncombe this afternoon?"

Diana felt that it would be all up with her if she said "Yes." So, trying her hardest not to look confused, she said:

"No. Why?"

"Certain girls must have been there, committing damage. I know that Betty and two of her friends called there; but I make no suggestion against them. It is unthinkable. You may go, Diana."

Outside the room, Diana stood still for a little while, going hot and cold by turns. No mistake, if she had admitted going to the house—well! As it was, she had given that satisfactory denial, and now she and her fellow-miscreants were safe.

At last Diana returned upstairs to the Fourth Form quarters. Encountering a batch of girls standing about in talk, she felt she might as well impart a bit of news.

"Something none of you have heard," Diana threw out importantly. "I'm to be the only bridesmaid."



Miss Redgrave studied the disfiguring fingermarks. Undoubtedly a girl's hand had done all this harm. But whose?

"What! Diana, never!" one and another of the girls exclaimed. "Only one bridesmaid? Whatever is Miss Redgrave thinking about? Why—why no one else but you?"

"Oh, well, the fact is," shrugged Diana, "she is feeling a bit hurt by the Form. You can't wonder. You know I have said all along there has been too much making fun—"

"Diana, once again," struck in one of the astounded listeners, "that is not right! You know very well we've never made fun of Miss Redgrave's wedding."

There was a gloomy pause.

"Shame that no one else in the Form is going to be a bridesmaid!" came a very bitter comment at last.

"Well, it's no use blaming me," said Diana virtuously, "I'm sorry for lots of you. Case of the good suffering for the bad, of course! You must blame Study 12 for it, that's all!"

"Not so fast, Diana! Study 12? How do you mean?"

"Oh, I'm not going to say! Miss Redgrave wouldn't like it. She told me, but then I'm Dick Burnaby's cousin! She won't have it made known in the Form—she said so only five minutes ago!"

And Diana, fully aware of how every word had impressed her listeners, broke away from them and stalked to her own study, chin in air.

Their Fault!

LIKE wildfire the news spread through the school. Miss Redgrave was going to have only one bridesmaid!

Study 12 had word of it whilst at prep. The chums fancied that those who came in with the news were rather looking at them—Betty & Co.—for an explanation. But no questions were asked. If they had been, then the girls would have had to plead complete ignorance. As it was, they simply owned to being utterly astounded, that admission being received with what appeared to be a snuff of suspicion!

"Queer," muttered Betty, when she and her boon companions were alone again. "Surely none of them think that we are to blame for Miss Redgrave's latest decision!"

"How can they?" laughed Polly. "As for me, I'm thinking what joy it must be to Diana—the one and only! Oh, well, eleven into eighty-seven, Paula—how many times?"

"Weally, Polly, it is no use asking me. I find a great difficulty in grappling with my own work this evening. Bai Jove, and now there is this latest sensation, what? Only one bridesmaid—one! Extraordinary, weally!"

"Hark! Pam and Polly interrupted together. Then the door flew wide open, revealing seven or eight jannies. One of these, Ella Elgood, being to the fore, was left to speak for all.

"What's all this," she asked the Study 12 girls, "about damage to Miss Redgrave's future home—the house in Barncombe?"

Betty and her chums stood transfixed.

"Miss Redgrave has been on the 'phone with the builders' foreman," Ella spoke on tensely. "Some of us, coming away from the library, couldn't help hearing her side of the talk. It appears that a lot of mischief was done to the place this afternoon. She was urging the foreman to get everything put right before Mr. Burnaby comes back from London."

"Good gracious!" gasped Paula. "How shocking!"

"Disgraceful!" agreed Betty distressfully. "But why come to us, you girls, as if—as if we were to blame?"

"We are not going to beat about the bush," said Ella indignantly. "There is good reason for believing that Miss Redgrave feels that the Form has insulted her."

"She can never have complained about us!" cried Betty. "Impossible!"

"She has not," Ella answered sharply. "But this much is known. Some girls or other in the Form did that damage at the house. Three girls were seen there by the gentleman who lives next door. And—three of you were there to-day, weren't you?"

Betty turned to Polly, and then they both looked at Pam, who in turn stood appalled. It was Polly who ended the sudden, dramatic silence.

"So that's it, is it? You girls all think that we must have done the damage! Although, as you admit, Miss Redgrave has not complained about us!"

"The cruel thing for her," said Ella, "is that she has had to suffer more or less in silence. She told Diana that you were at the house, and that's all."

"Ah, Diana!" murmured Betty. "We owe all this to her, do we?"

Then Diana herself, as a newcomer upon the scene, came thrusting through the crowd about the doorway.

"I've not said it was you, so see!" she protested hotly. "I've only said the same as Miss Redgrave

—that three of you Study 12 girls were at the house. If the Form chooses to put two and two together, is that my fault?"

"Diana, you shall not say—"

"I will say it, as I said it at the last meeting!" she fairly shouted at Betty. "I wanted to warn the Form, but it wouldn't hear me. Now it knows! It is thanks to Study 12 entirely that not a single girl in the Form is to act as bridesmaid!"

"Except yourself," Pam said, with a smile and bow. "Very well, Diana—and you others. There is no use, is there," she appealed to Betty and Polly, "in prolonging this scene?"

"Not a bit," said Betty, with sudden wonderful calmness. "I've no more to say. Time enough to give denials when Miss Redgrave starts accusing us."

Polly, agreeing, simply waved a hand as a silent, disgusted dismissal of the crowd. She and Pam, whilst it was melting away, turned their backs to the door. But Naomer rushed to that same door and closed it with a terrific slam!

"Tewwible!" sighed Paula, sinking into the armchair. "At this wate, bai Jove, what a wedding it will be!"

"Yes, bekas," said Naomer pathetically, "we shall not be allowed to go; that will be the next thing! And zen we not get any wedding-cake. I zink I buy a wedding-cake for myself, that is all. You see, I buy an ee-normous one, big enough for Study 12, but not for the rest of the Form. Bekas, they are a lot of—a lot of—"

"Stupes," murmured Polly.

"You're right, Polly," said Betty sadly. "They have let Diana kid them nicely. It is all Diana's doing, if only we could prove it!"

"And so we will!" Polly said vehemently.

Betty nodded.

"So we will. Meantime, there's still this blessed prep. to finish!"

With a sort of groan, Paula heaved up from the chair. Another minute found the girls working on again; but suddenly Polly flung down her pen.

"Oh, hang, I simply can't work!" she fumed.

"I keep on thinking—"

"But, Polly dear," was Betty's soothing murmur, "we are going to prove it!"

"I know! Yet I keep on thinking," said Polly tensely, "supposing—supposing we can't prove it, after all? Where shall we be then?"

"I zink," exclaimed Naomer, "we not be at the wedding, any old how!"

"And that, bai Jove," rejoined Paula dolefully, "is about what it means, geals."

"Oh, cheer up!" pleaded the Form captain. "We'll manage. There'll be a wedding, and we shall all be there—some of us as bridesmaids, after all!"

Then Naomer came round the table to hug Betty.

"Bekas," cried the dusky one emotionally, "when you talk like that it make me think: What the diggings is Diana compared with a girl like you?"

(END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.)

Blacker and blacker grows the prospect for Betty and the rest. Will it really end in their being excluded from the wedding? You must not miss a word of next week's story to see how the matter progresses. Entitled: "The Daring of Diana," it is a tale you will just love reading.