

SPLENDID NEWS IN YOUR EDITOR'S CHAT !

The **SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN** 2^d



**WHEN BETTY & CO.
WERE BLAMED!**

A thrilling moment in this week's
EXTRA-long, COMPLETE tale
of the chums of Morcov School.

Betty Barton and Co. in an EXTRA-Long, EXTRA-Thrilling, ENTIRELY Complete Tale of Morcove School.

When a Prefect Plotted!



For some reason of her own Lena Grayson, a prefect, had a "down" on the Fourth Form. It was evident she would go almost to any length to prevent their appearing in a local concert. But Betty & Co. little knew what was to be the outcome of the prefect's scheming—and in what disgrace it would involve them!

They Didn't Like Lena!

POLLY LINTON, madcap of the Fourth Form at Morcove School, came into Study 12 looking as black as thunder.

"Betty—"
"Well?"

Not having glanced up from her work, Betty Barton, the Form captain, did not know how annoyed her best chum was looking.

"Lena Grayson is rather throwing her weight about, isn't she, Betty, as a prefect? I have just been having a bit of a row with her."

"And I expect you came off best—eh, Polly?"

At this chuckling suggestion the madcap cheered up. She came to the table and tossed down some books with all her usual don't-careishness.

"I'm afraid I did answer back—to a prefect! Well, bother prefects when they are like Lena Grayson!" said Polly. "We're not worms!"

Betty, smiling, sat back in her chair at the table and spoke musingly.

"I expect it is because Ethel Courtway has gone home on special leave for a week or so, Polly.

We know jolly well that Ethel, as head girl, does a good deal to keep Lena Grayson from—well, from—"

"Bullying — you can call it nothing else!"

"Yes, bekas—" said the voice of that dusky imp, Naomer Nakara, girl-queen of Nakara in North Africa, who was coming into the study at this instant. But Polly cut the royal scholar short.

"You don't know a bit what I am talking about, Naomer."

"Yes, bekas I heard you getting chewed up by Lena Grayson on ze stairs for ze way you rush about. And eef I had been you, Polly, I would not have stood for it. No!"

Polly bridled instantly.

"Sh'rrp! It was only because I prefer to wait until Lena Grayson drops on you—which won't be long," predicted the madcap, "the mood she is in!"

"As ze matter of fack," said Naomer, "she has already dropped on me—just bekas I was going down to ze kitchen to ask cook eef her head was better. And I told Lena eef I wanted to spik to cook, bekas cook is a good sort, I should spik to her!"

"And then?" went on Betty blandly. "How many lines have you got to do for Lena, Naomer?"

"Eet all ze same eef it is fifty, or fifty meellion, bekas I am not going to do them no! What ze diggings, why should I?"

BY
MARJORIE STANTON

"On principle," said the Form captain, "juniors are not supposed to cheek prefects!"

"Eef they are nasty prefects—"

"If they are prefects, they are prefects, Naomer."

"So you just get on with your lines," Polly ordered the dusky one. "And don't try to teach me how to stand up for myself!"

"What!" shrilled Naomer with wide, round eyes. "So you are not going to get me let off those lines, Betty? Although you are captain! Well, zat is a nice thing, bekas, what is the use of a captain eef she not stand up for our rights?"

"Prove to me, Naomer, that you have the right to cheek Lena Grayson, and I'll take the matter up with Miss Everard this very minute," was Betty's half-serious response. "Mind you, I don't say you can't cheek Lena. Any girl can if she likes. I do myself. But you do so at your own risk. I can't encourage you in it."

Then that beloved but much-teased member of Study 12, elegant Paula Creel, came in looking almost on the verge of a graceful swoon.

"Bai Jove, geals! Bai—Jove!" gasped Paula, making for the best arm-chair in a collapsing manner. "Do you know, I had quite a wow with a pwefect! I weally have, yes wather! It was Lena Gwasyon—"

"Then I'm sorry for you," said Polly flippantly; but Paula took it as a remark of genuine sympathy.

"Thanks, Polly, thanks! For I am bound to say, I hev been tweeked most unweasonably, most wudely! I was merely awwanging my hair in fwont of the glass, and Lena Gwasyon came down upon me like a ton of bwicks, bai Jove!"

"Whereupon," said Betty, "you asked her what was it to do with her, or words to that effect?"

"Yes, wather! I'm afraid I did wather pwotest, but politely, mind you. Wealising that Lena is a pwefect, I felt it best not to use forcible language. I am, howevah, aggwieved. Most uncalled for interference with a geal's wight to wetaim a pwesentable appewance."

"Would you mind saying that all over again?" pleaded Polly in a hard of hearing manner.

"Please don't, Paula! Supposing," Betty interposed, "we all do a bit of work for once? Madge and others will be looking in presently, and we shall want to have a pow-wow about the concert at the Barncombe Assembly Rooms."

With a look of martyrdom Polly sat down to make a belated start upon prep. Paula Creel, giving a resigned sigh, also came to the table. Naomer, before making her start, visited the corner cupboard, but only to provide herself with a juicy apple.

She was presently left with a core to throw into the waste-paper basket, after which she made up for lost time.

Even Naomer was genuinely anxious to have all work finished when other members of Study 12 coterie were likely to wander in. As Betty had said, they would all want to talk about that coming concert.

It was one that was being arranged by the lady mayoress and a committee in aid of a distress fund for the local unemployed.

Winter was at hand, and it was going to be a trying winter for Barncombe. Bad trade and agricultural depression had already made their mark on the townfolk. To make matters worse,

there had been a very poor holiday season, so that those who reckoned to make a golden harvest in the summer months had done very badly.

As usual, the town council had not omitted to enlist the aid of Morcove School with this praiseworthy effort. Miss Somerfield, the headmistress, would have been on the committee, only she really had not a moment to spare for duties outside the school.

But she had heartily assented to the proposal that her girls should contribute a few items to the programme.

Suddenly Study 12's door opened, and a girl's head came round the edge of it. It was spiteful Cora Grandways.

"Betty, Lena Grayson wants you."

"Oh, does she!"

"At once!"

Slam!

Trust Cora Grandways to depart, giving a violent bang to this of all study doors.

"Well, I suppose I must see what her high-and-mightiness wants," laughed Betty, jumping up. "She might have come along if she wanted to talk about something. But, of course, Lena Grayson wouldn't—oh, no! She thinks herself quite as important as a mistress."

"And more so," said Polly. "My love to her, Betty!"

"And mine!" shrilled Naomer. "I don't zink!"

With another laugh, away went the Form captain, to meet Madge Minden, Tess Trelawney and other chums just coming to Study 12. Even then these girls were asking about the concert, and what was the latest that Betty had heard? But Betty pleaded that she couldn't stop now. Mustn't keep Lena Grayson waiting.

Morcove's prefects—all drawn from the Sixth Form—had each a study to herself. Fine rooms they were on the first floor. The one, for example, which Betty presently entered, was big enough for entertaining quite a batch of friends at any time—unlike Study 12 upstairs, that popular rendezvous which was so often packed to the walls.

Yet Betty felt that she would far rather belong to Study 12, seeing it crowded out evening after evening with such a wealth of chums, than have grand but solitary state that was Lena Grayson's down here.

Lena, very much on her dignity in a very showy study, seemed to wait for Betty to speak.

"You want me, Lena?"

"Yes, I do," was said curtly. "About the concert that is coming off in Barncombe. You Fourth Form kids don't need to take part in it."

Betty's brows went up.

"Why not? Why shouldn't we? We were told that an item or two by each Form will be welcome to fill the programme."

Lena looked annoyed. She was having something pointed out to her that she wished to brush over.

"I think you kids had better not have any part in it," she said, rising from an easy-chair to assume a domineering attitude. "You were in that pageant affair at Barncombe Castle a little while ago."

"Yes. Did we do so badly?"

"If you'll be guided by me," said Lena testily, "you will give this concert a miss. Go to it, of course; you can help in that way as much as you

"HAWAIIAN BABY" LUCKY CHARM GIVEN FREE NEXT WEEK!

like. But they don't want your performance this time, Betty."

"But why not?" smiled the Form captain. "And, honestly, Lena, I can't see what it has to do with you."

"As a prefect—"

"Oh, but what about the committee? What about Miss Somerfield's speech to the whole school in hall yesterday? And Miss Everard—our own Form-mistress—she has been saying—"

"All the same," broke in Lena irritably, "I am quite certain that you kids would do better this time not to—"

"But, Lena, most certainly we shall take a part."

A pause ensued—a tense pause. Form captain and prefect—they were meeting each other's eyes. The Form captain, whose part it was to watch the interests of the Form, and the prefect, appointed only to exercise a disciplinary oversight of juniors.

Betty knew, and full well Lena Grayson must have known, that it was outside the province of any prefect to try and dictate in a matter of this kind.

"Getting a bit cheeky, aren't you, Betty?"

"No, I don't think I am. I just don't see what right you have to interfere about the concert, Lena."

The prefect's lips tightened. She had no right, that was all too true; she only had a reason for not wanting the juniors to figure in the programme—and that reason was one she dare not divulge!

"I don't care, personally, whether you go in for it or not," she made a point of disclaiming falsely. Why should I?"

"Oh, all right, then—"

"All I know is—and I was saying so to Ethel Courtway before she went home on special leave—these affairs upset the minds of you kids for work."

Betty took leave to doubt that, with a smiling shake of the head.

"Anyhow, Lena, Miss Everard would—"

"It makes for rowdiness and all that. And I come in there as a prefect, anyhow. I know what it will be. As if you aren't tiresome enough, all of you, at the best of times!"

Betty laughed outright.

"Oh, Lena, how you do look at things—a different way from everybody else. Why, Miss Somerfield always says that there is nothing like some special interest, such as getting up a concert, or taking part in an outside affair, to keep us employed in our spare time."

"You—you won't be guided by me, then, Betty? Just for once advised—"

"No, Lena, 'fraid not. The Form's so keen—"

"Very well; but understand—if what I expect happens if your going in for the

affair causes any extra trouble—you can all look out! I shan't make any allowances, for I know." Lena added virtuously, "afterwards it will be said that you all got out of hand as soon as Ethel Courtway's back was turned!"

"Oh, Lena, what an idea! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't laugh at me, Betty! How dare you!" stamped the senior girl. "I know it will be so, and if other prefects don't care, I do. Well, I have warned you, so look out!"

A dismissing gesture followed the curt words, and Betty promptly withdrew, mingling mirth with indignation.

"The idea!" she said to herself as she closed the door behind her. "The cool cheek!"

As for Lena Grayson, alone again, she paced about the room with an air of undiminished rage. Not only had she come off badly in the battle of words; she now realised that she would have done better not to start it.

She could not command the "kids" to take no part in the programme, nor could she persuade them. What, then, could she do?

"For I must—I must manage it somehow!" she muttered to herself at last.

Lena paced the study again, biting her lip in anger. Now and again her hand moved to the pocket in her skirt as if there was something there to incense her anger anew.

And perhaps the reason for her being so determined could have been found in a certain letter which she took from her pocket at this moment to read again with frowning eyes.



"You Fourth Form kids don't need to perform in the Barncombe concert!" Lena Grayson said, in a domineering tone. Betty Barton drew herself up. "I don't know what you mean, Lena; we have already been asked to take part!" she answered steadily.

Concerning a Concert!

"WHAT a nerve!"
So the Study 12 chums were saying a few minutes later.

If only for the sake of amusing Polly and the rest, Betty had given them an account of what had passed in the prefect's study downstairs.

"When it is absolutely nothing to do with Lena Grayson!" was Polly's particularly scathing comment. "I vote we go in for the concert all the more."

"Hear, hear!" cried others.

"But what's her motive? That's what I can't make out," the captain pursued, becoming a little serious. "There must be something behind it all, if we only knew."

"Bekas eet all bunk to say that taking part in a jolly old concert makes us troublesome."

"Does she want to see plenty of room left for herself in the programme?" smiled Madge.

"I don't see how it can be that," argued Pam. "Lena happens to be a girl who can neither play nor sing—nor yet recite."

"Lots of people, come to that, are without any gifts in that direction," remarked Helen Craig, "yet they think they are just the ones. There are girls—"

"Present company excepted?" asked Polly.

"Present company excepted."

"I should hope so," nodded the madcap, from where she sat perched on the edge of the table.

"But, of course, Helen, you didn't mean your talented little Polly?"

The chums enjoyed a good laugh.

Betty suddenly took pen and paper.

"Just to show Lena Grayson, girls, what about holding a meeting to-morrow to get down to brass tacks about the concert?"

"Good wheeze!" applauded Polly.

"After morning school?"

"That's just it."

And so presently a notice to that effect went upon the green-baize board downstairs. In Betty's best round hand, there it was, to meet the eyes of Lena Grayson, as well as the attention of girls with far more right than Lena to feel interested:

NOTICE!

Will all members of the Fourth Form who wish to take part in the concert in Barncombe stay behind for a meeting in the class-room at mid-day to-morrow.

BETTY BARTON.
Captain, IV Form.

There was quite a flurry of enthusiasm amongst the juniors. All were keen about the concert, with the exception of two girls, who always scoffed for scoffing's sake.

Cora's favourite way of being obnoxious was to talk at the Form in general, by talking loudly to her one kindred spirit, Hetty Curzon.

"Now, Hetty," remind me in the morning in case I forget," Cora said as she got into bed. "I must attend that Form meeting. Most important. Not that I expect my help will be required. Still, I would like to clap when Betty explains how Study 12 is going to do everything."

"Very funny!" commented Polly witheringly. "But you really shall have a look in for once, Cora. I'm going to suggest that we put on a novel turn. Morcove's performing cat!"

Screams of laughter against Cora.

"Oh, funny yourself!" Cora snarled at the madcap.

"Who began it? Shut up now, anyhow!"

"Yes, bekas—"

"You! Pooh!" Cora sneered at Naomer. "I'll box your ears if I have any of your cheek!"

"Will you? I like to see you!"

Then Cora leapt from her bed to make a rush at Naomer, who skittishly dived under her own bed, crawling out the other side.

Naomer was out again, standing up, whilst Cora was still grovelling to try and seize an ankle, if one should be in reach.

"Get to bed, Naomer," counselled Betty.

"Wiz ze greatest of the pleasure, so good-night, everybody!"

"You can take that first, anyhow!" hissed Cora, falling upon Naomer to give her a sounding smack on the head. "You little—"

"Stop!"

That was Betty, after a lightning rush that enabled her to stay Cora's menacing hand.

"Let her alone, Cora!"

"I won't, for you!"

"You will!" said the captain sternly. "Go to your bed at once!"

"What's this quarrelling?" asked a voice from the doorway.

Lena Grayson! The whole dormitory realised, with mingled surprise and resentment, that Lena had taken upon herself to come here. It was a thing within the province of prefects, but it was never done by others.

"It's Betty," protested Cora virtuously. "She encourages girls to check me, then when I go for them, she interferes."

"You know jolly well I don't encourage anyone to check you," Betty dissented hotly.

"You don't seem able to keep order, anyhow, Betty," said Lena curly. "Night after night I hear a row like this at bed-time. There should be a rule, I think, that—"

"Lena!"

Lena turned round. It was Miss Everard, wearing a look that plainly questioned the prefect's right to be holding forth like this.

"Oh—er—I didn't think you would be coming up so soon, Miss Everard. There was a lot of noise, and I—er—"

"You may always leave the girls to me, Lena, after prayers. Good-night!"

Lena would have done better then to go straight to her own quarters for the night. But instead of profiting by the hint that her interference was not wanted, she did a very tactless thing, hanging about outside the dormitory for Miss Everard.

At last that mistress came away after a chummy good-night to all the juniors.

"Well, Lena?"

"I am sorry if you didn't approve of my going in to stop all the noise, Miss Everard. But are the girls to be allowed to do just as they like? I don't mind, so long as I know."

"All the noise," echoed Miss Everard lightly.

"My dear Lena, you were a junior yourself once. And if you are a prefect now, don't let that make you a kill-joy."

"Oh, they have a hard time in general, don't they?" Lena could not help saying rather sourly. "So in future I mustn't interfere when it's like a riot."

"You are being very silly, Lena. 'What's the matter with you?'"

"Nothing!"

"Then go to bed. It will be a bad day for Morcove, Lena, when we older ones forget to allow for high spirits among the juniors."

"It's not likely, the rate we are going on," Lena muttered, again betraying her ill-humour.

"With their meetings about concerts—"
 "Oh"—and Miss Everard gave her silvery laugh—"you don't think the juniors should be taking part in that concert, is that it? Just why, Lena?"

"Only that it upsets them. A mistress doesn't see all that goes on."

"This mistress sees and hears more than is generally supposed, perhaps," smiled Miss Everard. "And it all amounts to very little in the end, Lena; there is nothing wrong with Morcove, so don't let's try improving it to-night. Good-night once again."

And they parted.
 Lena was wishing now that she had never said such things to the Form-mistress. There was not the slightest chance apparently of Miss Everard's coming to the conclusion that perhaps there was a good deal of truth in the suggestion that the Form could have too many diversions.

Indeed, the Form-mistress at twelve o'clock next day was all goodwill about that meeting.

"I think I saw a notice on the board about a meeting after morning school?" she remarked when the books were being taken up. "Very well, girls, I hope it will be successful."

That said, and there being no call for a formal dismissal, Miss Everard picked up a few books of her own and departed. Whereupon, amidst great acclamation, Betty Barton was promptly voted into the "chair."

Proposed and Carried!

"SHUT the door first!"
 "All right, I shut him!"
 And the class-room door went slam! at the hands of skittish Naomer.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Now, Betty, carry on!"
 "Well, girls, I'm jolly glad to see that you've all stayed behind for this meeting. What we have to do first is to hear suggestions."

"How many turns in the programme are we allowed?" inquired one enthusiast eagerly. "Is anything settled about that?"

"I understand," Betty answered promptly, "we can settle amongst ourselves exactly how many turns, so long as our part in the programme doesn't exceed fifteen minutes."

"That doesn't give us long," said someone, but Polly argued:

"It's heaps long enough. Lightning turns—"
 "Hear, hear! That's it! They go down best."
 "So—suggestions?" Betty appealed from where she stood at Miss Everard's desk in front of the meeting.

"I know—"
 "I know—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came the laughter, now that half a dozen juniors were all wanting to speak at once.

"I know!" yelled Cora spitefully. "Let Study 12 do everything—as per usual!"

"You be quiet, Cora!"
 "Turn her out!"

"Order!" requested Betty calmly. "Look here, we ought to get through with this business and be out to games in next to no time. Well, Etta? Let's hear what Etta has to say, girls!"

So Etta Hargrove, who had caught Betty's eye, stood up.

"How would it be, girls, if we decide upon three turns, say, one of them to be done by the whole Form, the other two by—"

"Study 12!" jeered Cora, but that "joke" fell flatter than ever for the simple reason that Etta was not a member of Study 12.

Up jumped Polly Linton.
 "On a point of order! Is Cora Grandways to be allowed to—"

"No—o—o! Turn her out!"
 "Bekas—"

"Cora, if you don't behave," threatened Betty, calmly, "you'll have to go out."

Tremendous applause, drowning Cora's screeched retort. Then:

"About Etta's suggestion," cried Helen Craig. "I would like to second that."

"Hear, hear-r-r-r!"

It was such a din of approval, Betty had no need to ask for hands up. The meeting continued the discussion, more or less noisily, on the lines that there would be three Fourth Form items in the programme.

"Question is, then," Betty remarked, "what sort of item shall the whole Form do?"

"A play—a play!" various girls rashly clamoured.

"In five minutes?"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

"A play by Polly Linton!" yelled Cora. "Oh, how lovely! With Polly as the heroine, and a nice fat part for Betty and—"

"Cora," cried Betty decisively, "we are not going on until you have left the meeting. Kindly go—"

"Shan't!"
 "You will either go or be put out."

"Hear, hear!"
 "Yap, yap!" said Cora. Then she laughed.

But it was only another moment and she was changing her tune. Finding herself coming in for drastic treatment at the hands of some four or five girls, she resisted in a manner for which she was renowned.

Loudly she screeched her defiance, whilst hanging on to her desk as if to make it go with her if she should have to go. But it was all in vain. Finally hustled across to the doorway, out went Cora Grandways—headlong.

"Thanks!" Betty said to the very joyous chuckers-out as they gaily scampered back to their places. "Now we can get on better, perhaps?"

They did. In a few minutes everything was finally settled, to the satisfaction of all present, if one excepted Hetty Curzon, whose sympathies, it may be supposed, were with her ejected "pal." Hetty, still there, sweetly abstained from all part in the proceedings.

For item Number One there was to be a song by Elsie Ashby, accompanied at the piano by Madge Minden. Turn Number Two would be a topical monologue, specially written by Polly Linton for her own recital on the day.

The meeting had been most emphatic that Polly must do an original turn of her own all by herself.

Then, for the third item, there was to be something giving about as much scope for the whole Form as anybody could have hoped to provide within the time limit. It would be the nearest approach to a "revue" that could be done in, say, five minutes.

There again, it was not Polly's fault that she was to have a great deal to do with this item.

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The Form would not allow her to suggest anyone else. There were no others who could compose a five-minute act giving every character a line or two to speak, and a jolly good chorus to wind up with. Polly must pay the penalty of fame.

Incidentally she was warned, more forcibly than politely, that if she didn't do even better than her previous best, she would forfeit the right to consider herself official playwright to the Form.

As for the Form as a whole, it would now leave matters entirely in the hands of Study 12, ready itself to rehearse at any moment.

The question of what to wear had been raised, and it was now agreed that dresses used for previous theatricals should be worn. There were plenty available, stored away in a large cupboard under the stairs.

To that cupboard many of the girls rushed directly after the meeting.

Not all the girls could get into the cupboard by any means at one and the same time. But it was all good-natured scrimmaging that went on, some juniors inside the cupboard even passing out stage costumes to their friends—after they had had first pick.

Then Lena came up.

"What are you doing now, kids?"

"Seeing about the concert, Lena. Finding dresses."

There was no reluctance to afford this information. It was shouted by all most gaily.

"We have decided what we are going to do," Betty said, squeezing her way out of the cupboard now to let someone go in.

"Oh, have you!" said Lena, curling a lip. "Seems to me you have decided to make an awful litter. See that you leave that cupboard tidied up!"

She stalked away, but made a point of coming back ten minutes later. Betty and the rest had gone by then, and Lena should have found nothing to find fault with. The captain had seen to it that everything was left in good order.

But Cora had overheard that ugly hint from the prefect, and in the last few minutes Cora and Hetty had been at their old game again—making trouble for Study 12.

On the quiet, that tiresome pair had rummaged out all the cupboard's stage apparel that had not been taken away. Lena, coming back on purpose to see how the place looked, found the cupboard door left wide open and not one unwanted dress hanging on its peg.

Stage costumes were heaped upon the cupboard floor, and left about outside the cupboard.

"I'd like Miss Everard to see this!" seethed Lena.

From their watch point a safe distance away, Cora and Hetty nudged each other. They were grinning broadly.

With an air of offended dignity, Lena suddenly

went round to the stairs, and then the unsuspected watchers nudged each other again.

"Oh, dear, what a scream, Hetty!" bleated the Grandways girl a few moments later. "She's gone up to Study 12 about this!"

"Poor Study 12," chuckled Hetty, "when they try to make out that they didn't leave things in that state! I'd just love to be there, Cora! But perhaps it's as well we're not!"

"Serve them right!" scowled Cora. "I'll teach them to have me turned out of their rotten meetings! What I would like to do, Hetty, would be to get their part in the concert knocked on the head. And perhaps," was added with a cunning wink—"perhaps I will!"



"Oh—er—I didn't think you'd be up so soon, Miss Everard," Lena stammered. "There was a lot of noise coming from this room!"

Her Word Against Theirs!

UPSTAIRS in Study 12 all was commotion and laughter.

The room's crowded state was not preventing Naomer and others from putting on those theatrical costumes which represented their share in the raid upon the cupboard.

Thus, Helen Craig was rapidly assuming the appearance of an elderly lady of the Victorian period—curls and all!—whilst Naomer was suddenly discovering that, in her jubilant haste, she had started to put on some costume or other inside out, when the door flashed open.

"Betty!"

"Hallo?"

The captain could not help answering Lena Grayson in a rather bored tone. There seemed to be no escape from Lena.

"The cupboard downstairs! You girls have left it in a disgraceful state!"

"No, we have not—"

"How dare you contradict!"

"Because we didn't, Lena. We cleared up thoroughly before we left."

"You did not! Haven't I just seen with my own eyes?" panted Lena. "After I had warned you not to leave the place all upside-down! And I expect it was simply because I did ask you to be a bit tidy for once!"



—The chums were amazed. What right had Lena Grayson to adopt this overbearing attitude—even if she were a prefect!

"Oh, look here, Lena," Betty fired up, "I'm fed-up with all this rot! What's your idea? Why have you got this sudden down on us?"

"I've no down on you, as you call it. Why should I? But you're setting out to disobey me as a prefect, and do you think I am going to put up with that? I shall report it to Miss Everard."

"Oh, all right, report away!" Betty could not help saying.

"Yes, bekas—"

"Not a word from you!" Lena rounded on Naomer furiously. "And take that dress off! The whole lot of you behave like lunatics over this concert business! I knew it would be so!"

"It's our own spare time," submitted Betty blandly. "But you don't want us to go in for that concert, do you? Well, we are going in for it all the same."

The juniors could tell that this was exasperating Lena, but to what extent they were not to know. They would have had to know first her motive for being so desperately opposed to their appearing in the programme, and that motive was Lena's close secret.

For a moment she glowered upon Betty. Then: "Come downstairs with me, and you shall see the cupboard as I found it!"

"Very well."

"The rest of you can stay here!"

But Polly and the others, not considering that to be a reasonable command, preferred to ignore it. They even, whilst following Betty and the prefect downstairs, got other girls to come down with them. So there were plenty of girls to bear out Betty's indignant denial that they had left the cupboard in that state.

Yet Lena refused to accept that denial. Perhaps it was not surprising, for neither she nor the Fourth knew what Cora and Hetty had been up to.

"It's how I found the cupboard, and that's all there is to it. Now you will come with me to Miss Everard, Betty. I hold you to blame as captain."

There had been argument, however, noisy enough to bring the Form-mistress upon the scene. Miss Everard looked annoyed as she came up. A prefect in altercation with the juniors was not nice; nor was it pleasing to see such a litter, and to realise that her own Form was being held responsible for it.

"Oh, Miss Everard—"

"Well, Lena?"

"I have been telling these girls they need not have left things lying about like this after ransacking the cupboard."

"But we didn't! Miss Everard—"

"No, bekas—"

"Weally and twuly, Miss Everard—"

"Sh, sh! We cannot have this noise girls."

"They're so excited," Lena commented. "All because of the concert. There they've been rummaging out dresses to wear, and I particularly warned them to clear up afterwards."

"We did clear up!" the indignant chorus began again. "Miss Everard—"

"Silence, silence, please! Now, Betty, were you here?"

"Yes, Miss Everard."

"Was everything put away properly?"

"Yes, everything!"

The Form-mistress turned to the prefect, who was giving dissenting shakes of the head.

"But, Lena, if Betty says so—if all the girls bear out what Betty says?"

"And we do—we do!"

"Then I am not to be believed, that's all!" flashed the prefect. "We can't both be speaking the truth, that's certain!"

"Unless," rejoined Miss Everard, with a sudden smile, "someone made all this litter after these girls had gone away and before you turned up. I think that must have been it, and so—Oh, run away, girls, and let's have no more of it! And you, Lena, don't forget what I said last night, please."

The senior answered over her shoulder as she walked away:

"But was I far out in what I said last night, Miss Everard? This concert business."

"Oh, well!" laughed the mistress, making it quite clear that she would still take a very reasonable view of the matter.

The juniors were pounding upstairs again, and Lena strode for the open air, not wanting to hear sounds proclaiming such unchecked enthusiasm. A minute since and she had been in high hopes of converting Miss Everard to the idea that the juniors had better not, after all, go in for the concert. But now—

No use! The chance of making trouble for the Form over that affair of the cupboard had fizzled out. It would have to be something really scandalous on the part of the Fourth for Miss Everard to come down upon them heavily.

If only they would go a bit too far! If only something could happen so that the headmistress herself would simply have to say: "Now you really cannot go in for that concert. As punishment, others must take your place in the programme."

A sudden flush of shame came to Lena's cheeks. She knew herself to be in a stop-at-nothing mood. Moreover as a whole was such a school for fair play, but she could not act fairly towards the juniors at present.

By fair means or foul she had got to deprive them of their part in the concert. It had come to that. During the next few days she must be constantly on watch for a chance.

This being her desperate mood, she almost jumped for joy when, next day, she heard that the Fourth Form-mistress was going to Exeter for lunch for some shopping, and would not be back until late.

It was Saturday, and so all school work ended at midday.

"I don't suppose you will have any trouble with the juniors, Lena, but you might give an eye to them," Miss Everard said before going out to the car that was to take her and Miss Somerfield. "The girls have their arrangements for the halfer—an inter-Form match, for one thing. And then there is the business of the concert to keep them occupied."

Lena merely nodded as if quite unconcerned. At heart she was hoping that this was to be her chance.

"Oh, by the way, Lena," added the Form-mistress, pausing on her way out of the prefect's study, "I've given Betty and a few others permission to go into Barncombe after the match. There is a committee meeting about the concert at Lady Lundy's by-and-bye, and Betty thought she ought to let them know what the Fourth Form proposes to do, and get it all approved. I think it a good idea myself."

"You wouldn't rather that I went to the castle to see about it all, Miss Everard?"

"You? Oh, why should you?" dissented the

Form-mistress lightly. "No, no, leave the girls to manage for themselves, Lena. There is nothing like it. We do want to teach self-reliance. And Betty, as captain, has carried things through lots of times quite capably. Well, I must be off, and I am afraid it's going to be a wet journey, worse luck!"

Left to herself, Lena drifted to her study window, but not to give any concerned glance to the lowering sky. Rain would not matter to her this afternoon. She stood there, deep in thought.

Galling to know that Betty and others were to go to Barncombe Castle later on to get their items in the concert programme officially approved. After that—well, what hope would there be?

Presently she saw the two teams take the field for the match. A drizzle of rain had started, but the girls were going to take no notice of that. And Lena, although she longed to go down and order them indoors—simply as a bit of provocation—did not dare do so. No mistress would have stopped the game on account of such weather as this.

From her ground-floor study window she watched the match in progress, and once again she felt ashamed. The juniors were putting up a great fight against Fifth Form girls. Lena knew only too well how admirably Betty and her team were acquitting themselves. Yet they were the girls whom she was ready to strike at unfairly if she could.

Only let the chance occur, and she would take it. Rob them of the good name they had earned so fairly, cause them to be disgraced—anything so long as it brought that penalty upon them—no part in the concert after all.

By the time the match ended—with a great win for the juniors, too!—it was raining pretty smartly. Lena saw all the girls come running off the field, full-pelt for the schoolhouse.

Then she heard them pounding upstairs. It was the usual hub-bub for a little while, but by degrees the calling up and down passages and the banging of doors lessened. Most of the girls had completed their after games change, and had retired to their various studies.

Taking another glance out of the window, Lena was glad to see that the rain had set in for the rest of the day. That decided her, and next moment she was on her way to Study 12.

Even as she came to that study door she heard Polly Linton exclaiming:

"Blow the rain! Still, we'll go, Betty."

"Oh, rather! Macs and sou'westers—we'll be all right. We really must go, because—"

Lena made her interrupting entry.

"Betty, I understand you had some idea of going into Barncombe?"

"Yes, Lena, about the concert."

"You can't go in this rain!"

"But—"

"You can't go, and there's an end to it. Miss Everard is out for the afternoon, and I'm answerable for you, and I say that you mustn't think of going. You've had one wetting on the field."

"That was nothing. We've all changed into dry things. Surely, Lena, you are not forbidding us to go?"

"I am! And if you defy me—a prefect—"

Lena let a look say the rest. She and Betty were meeting each other's eyes.

Would the captain show defiance?

It was Lena's secret hope that Betty would do that, and she hung eagerly upon that girl's

next word, feeling that everything would turn upon that, with most vital results to all.

Just Like the Captain!

AT last Betty spoke.

"You are not being fair, Lena."

"What nonsense!" "It isn't! Just because it is something to do with the concert, there you are again, trying to oppose us."

"And just bekas Mees Everard is out for ze—"

"Sh'rrp!" Polly said to Naomer. "Leave it to Betty!"

"You say we can't go in this rain?" the captain resumed, still meeting Lena's eyes. "Well, then, what about our having the school bus?"

"The seniors are using that. Their away match—"

"When they get back. They'll be in by five at the latest. I suppose. Still time, Lena, for us to go in the bus then."

"No! The driver will have done enough. You might think of him."

"All I know is," Betty frowned, "it's urgent. Miss Everard said—"

"And all I know is you are not going, so you can make up your mind to that. Understand," Lena said, drawing back to the doorway. "I have forbidden you to go, and I am a prefect!"

"And well we know it!" was the comment from Polly that caused Lena to back sharply into the passage and pull the door shut—slam!

"Shame! Bekas ze rain is nothing."

"Of course it isn't!" flared out Polly. "And sho might have let us have the bus, anyhow."

"The rain," said Betty, "is simply her excuse—her chance to interfere. This really is a bit tough."

"Yes, wather! Bai Jove, most unsporting!"

"She never has wanted us to go in for the concert," Betty pursued indignantly. "and she is doing all she can to prevent us. It's as plain as anything."

"Then shall we go all the same, Betty?" broke out Polly impetuously. "And be hanged to her!"

But Betty, shaking her head, sat down.

"No. That would be simply playing into her hands. She is hoping that we'll defy her. I could read it in her eyes."

"But—"



Lena Grayson entered Study 12. "You kids have left the property cupboard downstairs in a disgraceful state! This concert is turning your heads!" she fumed. Betty and Co. gasped. What new trick of Lena's was this?

"Remember, two wrongs don't make a right. That's what Miss Somerfield would say."

"Except," Polly persisted, "that Miss Everard and Miss Somerfield are both away for the afternoon, and this is urgent!"

"It doesn't matter, we'd be at fault taking the law into our own hands."

Betty got up.

"No, girls; but I tell you what I will do—I'll telephone. Go down and ring up Barncombe Castle. I may be able to get either Lady Lundy or her daughter, Lady Evelyn, on the 'phone. Lady Evelyn would do—"

"Yes, wather, bai Jove! Now theah is a geal who is a weal sport!"

"Not like zat nasty, mean, unfair, bullying Lena! Eet what she is—a bully!" shrielled Naomer. "Bekas—"

"Oh, spare us, Naomer!" sighed Polly. "I'm keeping the names I've got for her until the next time I meet her. I'll have something to say then." And Polly stamped round the study.

Betty had sped off to do her telephoning, and now her three co-tenants of the study lapsed into gloomy silence. Nor did that unusual silence end

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until Pam Willoughby entered equipped for a journey in the rain.

"I'm ready, girls," she said serenely.

"We can't go," gloomed Polly.

"What?"

"It's that Lena." And Pam soon had the position explained to her.

"Too bad," was her comment. "When was there ever such a fuss made about a drop of rain?"

"And so I am deesgusted!" exploded Naomer again. "I go on strike eef nobody else will. I give that prefect what for, you see, queek! Bekas, eef we can't go into Barncombe, what ze diggings do we do about tea?"

"So that's all you have been thinking about, is it?" Polly rounded on the dusky one. "The nice tea you would have had at Barncombe Castle!"

"Gweedy wctoh—owp! Ow!" howled Paula, suddenly smothered by wrathful Naomer. "Healp! Stop it!"

"No, bekas—"

But Naomer did stop it next moment for the simple reason that Betty, after the five minutes' absence, had come rushing back all joyful excitement.

"Hooray! Girls, it's splendid!"

"Why, what—what, Betty?"

"Yes, you say, queek!"

"As soon as I explained that we were prevented from going to the castle, Lady Evelyn said she would come along to the school by car."

Polly first pretended to swoon, then she waved and shouted in company with delighted Naomer.

"Hip, pip!"

"Yes, bekas—"

"Bai Jove!"

"Hooray!" yelled the madcap. "A knock-out blow for Lena. Hip, pip! Lady Evelyn coming here!"

"To tea?" shrilled Naomer. "Betty, you say, queek, is it to tea?"

"She'll have some, of course."

"What ze diggings! We must make it a special spread! Queek, I start now to get ready! Out of ze way, Paula!"

"Wowp! Ow!"

"Don't knock up against me!" protested Polly, fending off the elegant one. "Well, this is great, and no mistake! We won't let Lena know, of course; but when she finds out afterwards!"

Betty now closed the door. She was still beaming.

"Keep cool then, girls, if you don't want all the world to know. We'll pass word to Madge and a few others—as many as we can seat. I'd love to make it the whole Form."

"Yes, wather!"

"Yes, bekas only one almond cake, and no cream-buns, and enough Sweess-roll for one. Er—"

A sudden pause. The door had flashed open, and there was Lena again.

"Yes?" inquired Betty with a rather weary smile.

"Is it right that you have been using the 'phone?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Cora said she saw you."

"That's Cora all over," said Betty. "But was it very terrible for me to use the 'phone, Lena?"

"You didn't ask my permission!"

"No; I didn't think it necessary. As captain, I am allowed to use the 'phone in connection with

Form affairs. And the concert is not a personal matter, Lena; it's the whole Form—"

"So you have been ringing up Barncombe Castle! Why?"

"Oh, just to let them know we couldn't go."

"It's as I say," Lena remarked fiercely. "You are thinking of nothing else. It has turned your heads. You do nothing but talk concert, concert—"

"Oh, I think we do a little besides, Lena. For instance," smiled Betty, "we did win that match this afternoon."

Slam!

Polly, now that Lena had angrily departed, fell back into a chair, clapping a hand over her mouth.

"I shall collapse!" she chuckled.

"You much better help me lay tea," said Naomer. "Bekas eet got to be a real tip-topper, yes! But quiet, bekas she will be saying we can't have tea next."

"Ha, ha, ha! All right!" cried Polly, coming feet to floor again. "Let's bustle, girls!"

Half an hour later, youthful Lady Evelyn was in their midst.

Her Reason Why!

"IT was very nice of you to come, Lady Evelyn."

"Yes, bekas—"

"Not at all. Something to do on a wet afternoon."

"Owing to ze nuisance of having prefects—"

"Sh'rrp! Lady Evelyn, you will sit here?"

"No, next to me, next to me!" yelled Naomer. Whereupon she had her car taken by Polly.

But Lady Evelyn intervened on behalf of the dusky one.

"Oh, let me sit next to Naomer, please. And talking of prefects, one met me at the door just now."

"She did!" cried Study 12, as with one voice,

"Lena Grayson she gave her name, and she wants to see me before I go."

"She does!"

The chums exchanged glances.

"Zen don't you go!" shrilled Naomer. "Bekas she is horrid and—"

"Tea!" Betty interposed tactfully, and they all took their seats. Everything was ready, and very nice the chums had made the table look.

"First of all—about the concert," resumed Betty whilst pouring out. "What's the latest at your end, Lady Evelyn?"

"Oh, you'd never guess. I'm on the committee, I am," Lady Evelyn pealed very merrily. "They would have me, if you ever heard of such a thing. I should be attending my first meeting now, only I came along to see you girls instead."

"What a shame!" said Helen Craig.

"This is better," declared the Barncombe Castle girl, accepting her cup. "I am not sure that I shouldn't have been turned out of the meeting, anyhow. But now you know, and if there is anything I can do for you girls, I will. What are your plans?"

Then, between them, the chums detailed all those ideas for which they hoped to receive the committee's approval.

Lady Evelyn clapped as each proposed item came out. Being well enough acquainted with Betty & Co. to know their capabilities, she had not the least doubt—and she said so—about their making a hit.

"The meeting will be over before I get back; never mind," she said at the finish of much

general chatter. "I'll call in upon the lady mayoress at her home, see one or two other members besides, then 'phone you up and tell you the news. But it's bound to be all right."

"This does me good," declared Polly. "Girls, I'm going to have a good go at the scenario-thing by-and-bye. Notice is hereby given, this study must be given up to me. No talking; no visitors!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Would you like me to go now?"

"Lady Evelyn!" was Polly's reproachful cry, as if such a suggestion, even in fun, had pained her.

So charming Lady Evelyn stayed on for a good quarter of an hour after chairs had been hitched away from the table. She was enjoying herself thoroughly, as she always did when on a lightning visit to Morcove School.

"But now, I suppose I really must be off," she remarked at last. Especially as I have to look in on Lena Grayson. Good-bye, all, and best of luck!"

"Our love to Lena when you see her," joked Polly.

There was a laugh from Lady Evelyn as she went out. Enough had slipped the lips of some of the girls to let her know the prefect had not been playing the game as Morcove liked to see it played.

The girl from Barncombe Castle knew her way to the prefects' studies on a floor below. She knew the school inside and out, every inch of it. A minute after leaving Study 12 she was lightly tapping at Lena's door.

Instantly it was opened wide by Lena, who struck Lady Evelyn as being strangely nervous.

"Oh—er—come in. Lady Evelyn, and—er—will you sit down for a minute? You've had tea? If not—"

"A ripping tea, thanks! But you go on with yours; don't mind me."

"That's all right. I—I've finished, in fact," said Lena, straying from the truth in her embarrassment. She had not even begun. "So you have been seeing Betty and others to hear what they had to say about their part in the concert?"

"The Fourth Form's part, yes," nodded the visitor. "I think their turns should be just splendid. Altogether, it's going to be a great concert. Tickets, too, are selling like hot cakes."

"I'm so glad," Lena said. She was still flustered, although the Barncombe Castle girl soon put anyone at ease. "Er—by the way, Lady Evelyn—er—"

"Yes?"

"I wonder—I wonder if—if room could be found in the programme for—for a relation of mine? It's my sister—recitations, you know, and all that. She is a very fine elocutionist, and—and really, I'm sure she'd go down well."

"Has she performed in public yet?"

"Er—not yet. She used to do little things at her school, you know, although she's left now. Breaking-up concerts and all that. But that's hardly the same, is it?"

"Well, hardly."

"I thought—if you could get the committee to—"

"Well, can you get hold of her for a try-out in front of the committee, Lena?"

"Oh, I don't think she'd care to come all this way just to be tried," demurred Lena. "You see, she doesn't consider herself to be just an amateur now. She's had special lessons—"

"But has not performed in public, you say? I don't see how," Lady Evelyn pondered aloud, "she can very well be worked into the Barncombe concert. It's local talent, for one thing; they want to keep it to that."

"Still, for a good cause—"

"Oh, yes!" Lady Evelyn was bound to give an assenting murmur. What she could not do was to say bluntly that it was rather unfair to inflict untried "talent" upon an audience that had paid, and paid generously for seats.

"You wouldn't feel like suggesting, Lady Evelyn, that some of our schoolgirls drop out of the programme—"

"So as to make room for your sister? Oh, I could never do that!" was the emphatic answer. "Morcove's talent is local talent. Barncombe, remember, speaks of Morcove as 'our' school. And girls like Betty and the rest are so well known for being able to give a jolly good entertainment."

A pause. Lena was heavy-hearted and a little sullen now. She was feeling resentful against Lady Evelyn. Another of them so keen to see Morcove School figure in the programme.

"The best I can suggest for your sister is this," resumed Lady Evelyn, rising to leave. "If she cared to be at hand on the day—well, somebody might have to drop out at the last minute—owing to illness or something."

"You mean, if—Betty and the others, for example, were prevented from doing their bit—"

"Goodness, I hope nothing so dreadful as that will happen!" laughed Lady Evelyn. "That would be awful! I am not saying anything against your sister. For all I know, she may



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be wonderful. But why not leave it at that, anyhow? Let her be available on the day."

"I—I see—"

"It's the best that can be done for her, I'm sure. The committee would say the same. She's a stranger, remember."

"Er—yes. Er—all right, Lady Evelyn, and thanks ever so," stammered Lena. "We'll leave it at that then. But Gracie—my sister—really is awfully good at elocution. We are all sure at home she is going to make a name for herself."

"Only she has to become known. Well, if people in her own district get taken with her—that's the way. Just the same as Barncombe will always crowd to see Betty and her chums, for instance."

Lady Evelyn was saying that on her way to the study door, and it became the moment for a certain listener outside that door to flit away.

Not for nothing had Cora Grandways thought it worth while to do a bit of prying. She came prancing back to her own study, told her sister Judith to "clear out," and then, being alone with Hetty Curzon, confided gloatingly.

"I've had such luck, Hetty. Now I understand a lot that has been puzzling me lately. Lena's got this grudge against the Form because she doesn't want it to take any part in the concert. She's been talking to Lady Evelyn, and I—I wasn't far off."

"Although they didn't see you?" grinned back Hetty.

"It seems," Cora whispered on. "Lena wants to push some sister of hers into the concert, but Lady Evelyn wasn't at all hopeful. And I don't wonder! I can imagine that sister. You could tell, from the way Lena spoke, the girl fancies herself much too much. 'Elocutionist!' Hee, hee, hee!"

Hetty laughed then.

"The sort the stage academies turn out by the thousand? Sheer mass production, as your father would say."

"That's it. I say, though, it all amounts to this, Hetty: Lena is desperately anxious to see Betty and the rest dropped out of the programme. And we are not taking part, so we shan't suffer?"

"Oh, no!"

"Lena's sister will be there on the day in case there's a blank to fill, see? Bit of fun for us, Hetty; two bits of fun, in fact. Get Betty & Co.'s part cancelled—that will be one up for us, eh? Get them into a row, so that Miss Somerfield is absolutely fierce. And then, apart from the scream that will be, on the day we can see this sister of Lena make a silly ass of herself."

"Ladies and gentlemen," Hetty mimicked an amateurish reciter, "with your kind permission, a little recitation, entitled: 'Little Orphan Annie'!"

"Hee, hee, hee! That's what it will be. Anyhow," Cora chuckled on, "we'll see if we can't bring it off, eh?"

"I'm game! But how?"

Cora shot a wary glance towards the door.

"Listen, Hetty, and I'll tell you."

And for several minutes after that the two discussed, in deep whispers, the very daring plan.

Now's Her Chance!

NO sooner had the early morning postman left his great batch of letters at Morcove School on the following Tuesday, than Lena Grayson came up to claim anything that might be for her.

There was one letter for the prefect. It was from her sister Gracie, and if anyone else had been privileged to read the missive it would not have conduced to a good opinion of the writer.

Gracie wrote all about herself and her talent. Very average ability, which self-conceit mistook for pure genius, popped out in every line. Also, she adopted a professional strain that would have jarred on anyone knowing her to be the merest novice. It jarred on Lena just a little, although Lena shared the family's belief that Gracie really was—a prodigy! Gracie would make the family name famous before long.

Meantime, there had been a little party at home, and Gracie had given one of her favourite turns—an imitation of somebody at the top of the tree in the concert world. The family and its friends had thought it great—so Gracie said. So how about that concert that was coming off in Barncombe? Had Lena been able to "wangle things" yet?

Lena pocketed the letter and sauntered about the ground-floor of the schoolhouse. No, she had not been able to "wangle things" yet. Last Saturday's attempt had come to nothing, and she saw no prospect of any other chance half so good coming her way.

The Fourth Form had not played into her hands. That provocative line which she had taken—it had failed to do the trick.

If only Betty Barton and other juniors had gone into open revolt against her, she, Lena, would have had the law on her side, so to speak. For she would certainly have been able to justify anything she had done last Saturday.

But now she had to be very careful, or she might stand exposed as one who was abusing a prefect's authority.

Other girls came trooping down from the dormitories, and Lena, to avoid them all, made her way by a little-used staircase up to her own study.

The schoolhouse was alive with high-spirited chatter which was never checked at such an hour as this. Even as Lena mounted by one staircase, she could hear much of what was being said—or rather called from one girl to another—on the main stairs. And it was all about the concert—every word of it.

The Study 12 girls and many other juniors—they could talk of nothing else in their spare time.

"What rot it is!" Lena said to herself sourly. "As if their parents send them to Morcove for that sort of thing!"

Yet at heart she knew that every right-minded parent would approve of what their daughters were being allowed to do in aid of a good cause.

The better side of Lena's nature reminded her, too, that it was "rot" for her to have lain in wait to catch the juniors tripping, making good discipline the excuse. She knew that she was only playing her own game all the time, and only so as to obtain reflected glory.

The thought came—it could not be resisted, and—oh, how it galled her!—that it was not even a case of one sister wanting to help another who was struggling to make a living. The family was well off. It was only a whim of Gracie's to go on the stage.

Lena was thinking again, as she took the last steps towards her study door, how fine it would be for her to be in the audience, hearing her sister clapped and encored. All those hundreds of people going wild with enthusiasm over a member

of her own family. And afterwards, back her at the school, girls unable to stop talking about it.

But was there the least likelihood of Gracie's getting a chance to go on at the concert? Just as if any of the arranged turns would drop out. Nor was Gracie, as this morning's letter had said, at all inclined to come to Barncombe on the mere chance of serving as a substitute. She imagined herself to be something better than that!

In a moody fashion Lena threw open her study door to go in—and then she stopped dead.

Her brows went up in sudden surprise, then drew together in a heavy frown.

The study—it had been turned upside down in the night. It was in a disgraceful state—"ragged" to bits!

After a moment she advanced into the chaotic room, to stand gazing around. "Ragged"—yes, and by whom?

revolt openly—too artful! They've done this, thinking I'll simply straighten up the place and not let anybody know. Well, they're mistaken!"

Biggest mistake those kids had ever made. A thing like this—done by them—good! There would be a change in that concert programme after all; a sudden casting about for other talent. The headmistress could never overlook such an outrage as this.

Less than a minute later Lena was with Miss Everard.

"Morning, Miss Everard!"

"Morning, Lena! You want me?"

"Will you please come to my study and see the state it is in? All turned upside down—"

"What?"

"You never saw such litter—sheer wreckage! I'll never be able to get it straight again. They've broken some of the things."



"I'd like Miss Everard to see this!" Lena Grayson seethed. From their watch-point, Cora Grandways and Hetty Curzon grinned broadly.

"Ah!" she emitted, as the obvious answer flashed upon her. "The juniors! Those kids! Betty and the rest—this is their work!"

From this it was a leap of her mind to the thought: Nothing could be better!

"Now I've got them! Now they will be in for a row!"

Again she stared around. Only let a mistress view the scene, and the culprits would suffer the very severest penalties. Punishment almost as drastic as expulsion would be exacted somehow, that was certain.

And the Fourth Form juniors were the culprits! Lena was certain of that.

"I see it all," she said to herself, a savage delight welling up in her. "This is their hit-back for last Saturday. They couldn't be made to

"They, Lena—'they'?"

"Your juniors! Oh, it's their doing right enough!" Lena cried wildly. "Who else would it be? None of the bigger girls would be so mad. Besides, there's spite in this, and I haven't a single girl against me in other Forms."

"Are you suggesting, Lena, that girls in my Form are against you?"

"Of course they are, Miss Everard. Oh, I know why it is! This is their hit back at me because last Saturday I forbade their going off to Barncombe in the pouring rain. I saw at the time how they resented it. Yet if a prefect can't decide what is best for them—"

"I'll come with you," interrupted the Form-mistress with regained composure. "You mean to say that your study has been ragged?"

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"Wrecked completely!"

This passionate answer left Miss Everard tight-lipped, hastening with Lena to the scene of havoc. On the way they passed many girls, some of them juniors, but nothing was said to them.

There was, however, such a look on Miss Everard's face as gave Betty and others some concern.

"Did you see that, Polly?" exclaimed the captain, after the Form-mistress had gone by with Lena.

"Yes! Now what's the trouble?"

"Bekas—what ze diggings! Eet look as if there is a jolly old row about something."

"Lena was with Miss Everard," commented Helen Craig, with a grimace.

"Yes. That's what I don't like about it," said Polly. "Oh, well, we shall soon hear, I suppose!"

Truer prediction was never made. A few moments more and the cry came:

"Betty Barton—you're wanted! You had better all go," advised that senior who had come seeking the juniors, Lena's study.

"Why?"

"Oh, don't pretend! You know very well."

"We don't, Clarice. What's the row?"

Clarice Berkeley scorned to answer. Turning her back in open disgust, she walked away.

"Well!"

"Bai Jove! Oh, deah—oh, deah!"

"Yes, bekas—"

"Come on up. We'll soon find out," said Betty.

They found several seniors clustered about the doorway of Lena's study, but there was no need to ask these tall girls to make way. Quickly enough way was made for Betty & Co. They crowded through, to find Lena and Miss Everard in the study, although it was not so much as a glance that the girls had for those two.

They could only stand agape at the whole ruinous scene.

"Betty—all of you!" came Miss Everard's stern cry. "You did this?"

"This, Miss Everard?"

"That is what I am saying! Lena here assures me that it must have been you. Out of spite against her."

"No, no, Miss Everard! Oh—"

"Why, it's positively wicked!" was Polly's furious shout.

"Bekas—"

"Silence!" rapped out the mistress. "You had far better say nothing unless you can frankly own up."

"But, Miss Everard," said Betty calmly, "we didn't do it. This is a mistake."

"Up ze wrong tree altogether; bekas—"

"We know nothing whatever about it—nothing!" Betty declared flatly.

"But Lena says that it must have been done by you," persisted Miss Everard in great grief.

"She says it is your hit back at her on account of last Saturday."

"Oh, but we wouldn't be so silly!" laughed Betty.

"It's the truth!" cried Lena fiercely. "You thought I would be ashamed to let it be known that my study had been ragged. But I have nothing to be ashamed of. I know you resented what I did last Saturday, but I was acting for the best. Only you have been so crazy about that concert. It's as I have said all along, it's turned your heads!"

"As you know, girls," exclaimed Miss Everard

sadly, "I am the first to take your part at any time. But can I be expected to defend such conduct as this? I will believe—because you say so—that you yourselves are not culpable. That it has been the work of some girls or other in the Fourth Form, however, I cannot doubt. The matter must be gone into by the headmistress. Come with me at once!"

All Must Suffer!

BY breakfast-time the news had spread like wildfire through the school.

The Fourth Form was in disgrace!

There had been a full inquiry into the affair by the headmistress. Verdict: That the "ragging" of Lena Grayson's study had been committed by some junior or juniors at present unknown.

Certain Fourth Form girls, including the captain, had had their word accepted that they had not been a party to the outrage. But even to them the suspicion attached that they had been feeling very hostile towards the prefect. Miss Somerfield was taking the view that Study 12 must have had an inkling of it. Accordingly it was a case for all-round punishment.

Had the actual culprits stood forward and taken the entire blame upon themselves, declaring that nothing said by other girls had led them on, it would have been a different matter altogether. But nobody had confessed, and the headmistress did not know how many girls had been involved.

And the penalty which the entire Form had to undergo was this: No part in the forthcoming concert!

It was known that Miss Somerfield intended to write to the committee, saying that the juniors must be excluded from the programme. With deep regret, she and her colleagues had reached the conclusion that it was not good for the juniors, after all, to have any part in the affair. It made them too excited and unruly, and they had been giving great trouble.

Nor would the Fourth Form be allowed to go to the concert even as ticket-holders, unless in the meantime there was a frank confession by the actual culprits, absolving all other girls.

Discussion could not take place at the breakfast-table, but as soon as the juniors were by themselves, feeling was running very high.

Betty, trying to prevent matters going from bad to worse, had all she could do to calm Polly and other hot-heads.

The theory was put forward that Lena had even staged the whole thing herself—"ragged" her own study for the sake of making out a case against the Form!

Betty would not hear of this, and there were equally fair-minded girls who saw the danger of jumping to such a convenient conclusion. Lena was not as bad as that.

But the final abandonment of this suspicion left the Form faced with that very disagreeable conviction: Somewhere in the school the culprit must be preserving a cowardly silence—somewhere in the Fourth Form itself!

School that morning was a miserable business. Miss Everard for once was sharp with all. Her girls could tell they had fallen badly in her estimation—had forfeited her chummy disposition to indulge them. It was not surprising. She had every right to treat them as girls who had abused much kindness.

At twelve o'clock they were dismissed in brusque manner, and afterwards the girls did not find

themselves as free from oversight as they were accustomed to be. There could be no getting together for talk. Miss Everard had them out to games to keep them occupied.

Compulsory games! It amounted to that—a new and very irksome departure for the Fourth.

But what was worse than anything else was the knowledge that the Form would not figure in that concert programme.

Other Forms' arrangements were still holding good. It was rumoured that the Fifth had some particularly clever turns to do.

Next morning Polly had a note from youthful Lady Evelyn. It was one that seemed to mark a change in that girl's feelings. There was not the usual chummy writing in it that led Lady Evelyn to fill four pages.

"Look at this," Betty said to Polly, coming into Study 12 with the missive.

Then Polly read:

"Dear Betty,—I was very sorry to hear that you and your chums will not be taking part in the concert after all, and to know the reason why.

"I gather that there is not the slightest likelihood of your headmistress changing her mind. Mother was very sorry when I told her, and I must say I was surprised.

"Best wishes!
"Yours sincerely,
"EVELYN KNIGHT."

Polly put the letter from her on the table with an expression of having tasted sour gooseberries.

"Hang and dash!" she exploded next moment. "Ugh! To think that those who ragged the study won't have the courage, the decency, to come forward and own up! The whole Form must suffer! Rotten shame!"

"It is beastly!" sighed Betty. "But it's no use going on—"

"It's the rotten sneakishness of those who did the deed and won't own up," Polly raged on, banging books about. "Look at this!" And she held up an exercise book. "I might as well tear it up—the book of words I had as good as finished for the 'Five-Minute Revue.' I hit it off in next to no time. I was keen then. But now—"

"Don't destroy it, Polly. It may come in handy some other time."

"For ze simple reason—" Naomer cried,

coming in just then; but Polly turned quickly.

"Now then! No remarks from you!"
"Oh, don't let it worry you, Polly! Be like me, and let them see you don't jolly well care, bekas we know we are innocent, and ze concert will be a failure without us, any old how."

At this instant there were peals of laughter from Hetty and Cora as they went by in the passage. Perhaps they had heard Naomer taking that view of the unhappy situation.

"You talk like a little chump, Naomer!" said the madcap.

"Bekas I have been so long in zis study with you—"

The rest was all commotion.

Meantime, Study 12 little dreamed that this morning's post had brought one other letter from Lady Evelyn for a Morcove girl.

Alone in her study, Lena Grayson was reading a note with joyful eyes over and over again:

"Dear Lena Grayson,—Now that the Fourth Form has been dropped from the programme, other turns must be found.

"I have told my mother and other members of the committee about your sister, and she can go into the printed programme if you will get her to supply particulars at once. I hope it will be a good thing for her.

"It was not that I was unsympathetic when I had that talk with you, only that there was simply no opening then. But the Fourth Form's dropping out has made a big difference."

"As I always knew it would," Lena was thinking as she came to that passage in the note. "It has come all right for me—I mean, for Gracie—after all."

Not the least compunction was troubling Lena now. Why should it? The Fourth Form had brought the whole thing upon themselves. What, after all, had she done towards them that they should feel entitled to wreck her study?

It was time to go down into class, and jauntily she passed from her study. Elation filled her. Downstairs she availed herself of a prefect's right to use the telephone, ringing up her sister Gracie

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The juniors pelted off the field after their victory. Lena Grayson watched them furiously. "If only they would do something to get into disgrace!" was her spiteful wish.

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—a trunk call of fifty miles or more, but there was no delay.

"And I'll write to you by this evening's post, Gracie," was her concluding cry. "Yes, it was an awfully nice note I had from Lady Evelyn. Good-bye!"

Betty and her chums were going past in the hall when Lena shrilled those last words into the receiver. The juniors would have had to be deaf not to hear the bit of telephone talk.

Then they saw Lena come out of the far-from-sound-proof telephone booth, looking very jaunty. "Well, kids!" she smiled quite forgivingly in passing.

The chums found themselves standing still on their way to the class-room, meeting one another's eyes.

"She's had a letter from Lady Evelyn?" muttered Polly blackly. "And who's 'Gracie'?"

The others, equally puzzled, frowned. "Girls, do you see the time?" cried Miss Everard, still inclined to be very strict. "To your desks at once!"

And to their desks went Betty & Co. with the rest of the Form, feeling that it was nothing but work, work these days.

And for Lena, when tea-time came that day she had the great pleasure of telling other seniors, whom she had invited to her study, that her sister Gracie was going to appear at the concert.

"Her first appearance in public, you know, but I am sure she will be a success," said Lena. "At home we think her awfully clever, and I'm so glad to have been able to arrange this thing for her."

Lena said it with a perfect air of proper pride in wanting only to further a sister's interests. She was now forgetting completely how she had started—by thinking only of the reflected glory that it would mean for her.

"First" and "Third"!

LENA was in the train for Morcove the following Thursday afternoon.

How many other Morcove girls might be on the train Lena did not know, for she herself had caught it at the very last moment.

A call at Barncombe Castle to see Lady Evelyn had resulted in Lena's being given tea, and the time had flown so pleasantly that there had had to be a final rush to the station—a flying up the platform and a getting in anywhere just as the guard was signalling his "Right away!"

Now, whilst the train of shabby old coaches wound its way out into the open country, Lena sat heaving for breath, alone in a compartment of the last coach. It was a combination of firsts and thirds, and she, in her great haste, had entered a third, in spite of a first-class ticket.

Everything was going well.

By Saturday morning the bills would be out for the concert, and the programmes printed. Her sister's name had been sent to the printers, too. Gracie's name was to be in the bills—on the boardings in Barncombe—as well as in the programme. And it was all tending to make Lena herself swell with pride.

How she longed for the hour when, sitting amongst so many other Morcovians in the assembly rooms, she would hear her sister being clapped and encored again and again.

Suddenly the go-as-you-please "local" was pulled up in a cutting. It was the sort of thing

that often happened on that little-used branch line, where platelayers could even ask a train to wait instead of interrupting their work to let it pass.

Lena was quite unconcerned at the wait, and she would have gone on thinking about the pleasant half-hour it had been at Barncombe Castle, but the silence caused by the train's standing still forced her to overhear two girls in talk in the next compartment.

"Now we're going to stay here all night, Hetty!"

"Don't care if we do, Cora! They can't blame us for being in late, anyhow."

"They can if they won't believe that it was the train's fault. And there's nobody else belonging to Morcove on board who will bear us out."

From this, perfectly audible as it was to Lena, she inferred that Cora Grandways and Hetty Curzon knew nothing of her having boarded the train at the last moment. She heard them indulging in some more spinnacys, laughing at each other's witticisms; then they made remarks about the concert, and she realised that there was even something in connection with that for the hoydenish pair to chuckle about.

She could not help listening. "Only the sickener is," Cora said after a chuckling remark, "we can't go to the concert either."

"Oh, well, I suppose we couldn't have it both ways," was Hetty's light reply. "We've had the fun of getting the Form dropped out of the programme."

"Yes; poor Betty & Co. † Poor Fourth Form! Hee, hee, hee!"

"I just wonder, Hetty, if we could wangle special permission to go to the concert?" broke out Cora. "Anything to be done with Lena? She's a pre."

"You're not suggesting that it would be safe to tell her that she owes it to us her sister is going into the programme?"

"Just as if! She might not thank us after all for having ragged her study. But—"

The engine whistled, and the whole train jolted on again, the rattle-rattle of such old rolling-stock drowning the muffled voices.

Only as much as that had Lena, by this strange chance, overheard. But it had been enough!

Now she was pale with excitement. She knew—she knew at last who had "ragged" the study!

She knew that Hetty and Cora had done the deed not out of any spite against her, Lena, but simply to involve the whole Form in disgrace.

Betty and all the rest—entirely innocent, suffering undeservedly!

As soon as the worst effects of the shock had passed off, Lena felt ashamed. The fair thing to do was to tell Morcove as soon as she got indoors. Denounce Hetty and Cora, and so make it possible for the rest of the Fourth to go in for the concert after all.

There was still time for them to do so. Neither placards nor programmes were yet printed.

Then came another thought. Where would be Gracie's part in the concert if the Fourth Form enjoyed a sensational "come back"? It was absolutely certain Gracie would be told that she must stand aside.

The committee would not consider it at all unreasonable or unkind. Gracie had been put to no trouble or expense as yet; she was only a makeshift, being taken largely on trust at that.

"Poor Gracie!" murmured Lena as the train

rattled along; and then suddenly she flushed to the roots of her hair. She felt it was hypocrisy to talk like that.

This—this was the moment for her to feel reminded of her original reason for wanting her sister to be in the programme.

"All for Gracie's sake" was pure humbug, and Lena knew it! She had been thinking only of the limelight that it would mean for herself when first she plotted to get Gracie into the programme at the Fourth Form's expense. And it was just the same now.

The train crawled into the little wayside station that served the school. Hetty and Cora, jumping out of a first-class compartment, looked rather flustered when they saw that another Morcovian had travelled in the adjoining third. Lena Grayson, too!

Lena said nothing, however, nor did anything become known when she and the two juniors were under Morcove's roof again.

At times Lena was terribly wretched—horrified at what she had done. It kept her awake half that night—the guilty sense of leaving a great wrong unrighted for the sake of reflected glory.

Next day had moments when she felt she must jump up and fly to Study 12 to be at peace with her conscience.

But this impulse, as often as it seized her, was overpowered by her longing for the reflected glory that would be hers on the day of the concert.

And so the Fourth Form at Morcove School—when a word from Lena would have made all the difference—still went on paying a penalty that it never should have suffered.

After All—

"I DON'T care ze hoot for anybody, I tell you; I not stand eet, no! I am going to ze concert—"

"Naomer—"

"Eef I get expelled for eet I shall still go, and nobody shall stop me!"

Naomer, now that the great day for Barncombe had come, was creating consternation in Study 12 at Morcove School. Her best chums could not get her to be reasonable at all.

"If you talk like that, Naomer," said Polly grimly, "I shall have to tie you up to a leg of the table or something."

"No, you won't! For ze simple reason—"

"Listen, Naomer," pleaded Betty appealingly. "I know it's a shame we can't even go to the concert as part of the audience, let alone be in the programme. But—Whea!"

"Oh, the young monkey—she's off!"

It was only too true. Naomer had suddenly whisked out of the study, to go flying up the corridor.

Polly, like Betty and others, had a vision of the dusky one whipping hat and coat from a peg downstairs and then dashing off again—to run all the way to Barncombe. The concert was not timed to begin until three o'clock, and it was now only half-past one. But Naomer was off before she could be stopped.

"I'll stop her, though—I must!" gasped Polly, rushing out after the runaway. "My goodness!"

"Dweadful, dweadful!" groaned Paula. "She weally is a little wogue!"

"Well," said Pam quietly, "I'm not surprised. It's not easy to get a girl like Naomer to see—"

"Somebody at the door," broke in Betty, who had heard a tap. "Come in!"

And then—tense silence—frigid silence. Lena Grayson had entered.

"Betty—"

"Oh, please go away, Lena!" the captain could not help saying bitterly. "Isn't it enough that through you we've been done out of—"

"You are not going to be done out of anything after all," was the outcry with which Lena electrified the chums. "There's very little time—I've left it until the last moment. Oh, I

have been an idiot!" she reproached herself drearily, and they saw her eyelashes glistening. "But if you like you can go to the concert—"

"What!"

"Bai Jove!"

"I—I can make things all right for you," Lena spoke on huskily. "You see, I—I have found out that the Form should not have been punished for ragging my study. I can explain to Miss Somersfield at once if you'll come with me, Betty."

"But—Lena! Oh—"

"My gwacious! Hooway!"

"Lena!" the captain cried again joyfully. "Then who did rag the study?"

"I am not going to say. I'm afraid it would mean their being expelled after all this time, and how can we have that?"

"No—oh, no! But—"



"Lena Grayson wants to see me before I go," charming Lady Evelyn was saying, and she could not help noticing the significant glances that the chums exchanged.

"I must convince the headmistress that—the Form as a whole was innocent. I think I can do that. I am sure I can. And now I only wish," Lena continued almost tearfully, "that I had spoken sooner instead of being weak and selfish. I hate myself for it all, I do. I'll be frank with you at last. I found out several days ago—quite by chance. Up till then I honestly believed that you all had a part in ragging the study, but—"

She broke down for a moment, and there was the sudden strange spectacle of Betty, a junior, going close to the stricken prefect to comfort her. "Lena! Oh, it's all right now. That is, if—"

"If I'm sorry, were you going to say? I am sorry, girls," was the emotional cry. "But I've left it all too late, of course; you can only go to the concert as seatholders, when by rights you should be—"

"No, Lena, you haven't left it too late. Pam—one of you," Betty appealed excitedly to her chums, "run after Polly—oh, quick! Tell her—tell Naomer as well. If we all bustle up, perhaps we can be in the programme after all."

Two of them sped away, whilst Betty continued addressing Lena.

"It's like this, Lena. We are not caught quite unprepared. I don't know if it can be arranged, or if they will want us to perform after all; but if they do, we can. Polly had the 'Five-Minute Revue' written before we all got dropped out of the programme. It's only a line or two for each girl. Madge will manage the music, and—well?"

"That's splendid!" was Lena's brightened cry. "Of course they will want you to do your bit if only you can."

"Wait, though!" cried Betty, on the point of following Lena out of the study. "What about your sister?"

"She—she must stand aside, that's all." "Oh, no!" dissented the captain flatly. "Oh, we'll manage!"

Meantime, Polly and Naomer, having heard the exciting news, came rushing back to Study 12, Naomer just as eagerly as the madcap.

"Hoo—jolly—ray! Bekas, gorjus!" shrieked the dusky one, whilst Polly fetched out the MS. of her "Five-Minute Revue." "Now to get ze move on!"

"Yes, wather! Bai Jove, great wejoints!"

"Down to the music-room, come on, all! Find the others!" Polly fairly yelled. "We are not going on the stage unless we can do it properly. The music-room, pronto!"

There Betty found most of the Form five minutes later, when she was ready to impart more inspiring news.

Miss Somerfield, after hearing all that Lena had to say, had phoned into Barncombe.

Lady Lundy had been emphatic. The Fourth Form certainly must take part in the concert after all. It would be unfair not to let the girls do so now that they were proved innocent.

Yet Gracie Grayson would not be displaced. Betty herself had made that generous stipulation.

The Fourth Form would not have its song and monologue. It would do only the "Five-Minute Revue."

Such was the arrangement, but the audience itself had something to say about that when the time came.

There was such applause and encoring after the "Five-Minute Revue" the Fourth Form juniors could not escape finally from the stage by merely bowing again and again.

In vain Betty reminded the packed auditorium that there were others. The clamour for more samples of Fourth Form talent could only be appeased by Polly's doing her original monologue, and Elsie Ashby's pretty song being sung to Madge Minden's accompaniment.

Both these items were received with rapturous delight. People, whilst they clapped and stamped their applause, turned to one another with the beaming remark: "They had never known even Morcove School provide better fare."

Then Gracie Grayson went on, and—well, it could only be supposed that her much-talked-of talents were not suited to this particular audience.

She might be going to become very famous one day. Her acting may have been full of the right "professional" touches. Her imitations of famous artistes may have been very difficult to do—although they were only imitations.

Gracie was accorded applause, of course, but it was only indulgent applause. Fortunately for Gracie's own egotism, she considered she had made quite a sensation. As for Lena, she had risen above that unworthy state of mind which, in the last week or two, had made her play such an unfair part, or she might now have come in for a very painful blow.

There were moments when she squirmed, whilst her sister was upon the stage. Lena had Morcovians all round her, in the audience, and their comments gave her to understand; it had been pure folly for her to make out that her sister was so wonderful!

Just in time, Lena had decided to play the game after all, be the cost to herself what it might. And, strangely, instead of penalties there appeared to be only rewards.

Already she had had the joy of seeing the juniors do so well at the concert. That was one reward. Another was to come.

Betty, late that evening, sought out Lena in the latter's study.

"Lena," said the Fourth Form captain, "we noticed that Hetty Curzon and Cora Grandways were not at the concert this afternoon."

Lena nodded. "I had to name them after all, Betty, as the culprits or Miss Somerfield would never have freed the rest of you from blame. It's a pity, but there it was."

"It was a pity, too," Betty said steadily, "that you ever thought it necessary to keep us out of the concert, to make room for your sister. Room was found for her and for us as well. We could always have managed it, Lena—if only you had told us about it from the beginning."

Lena, a prefect, was silent, looking really ashamed again.

"But there," said Betty, ending another lengthy pause, "we'll forget it, Lena. The Form asked me to come along and tell you."

And she added softly: "For you did play the game in the end, Lena. That's why!"

And in those final words of Betty's, the prefect had that other reward.

THE END.

Next week's special number of the SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN contains the first part of a wonderful book-length story by MARJORIE STANTON. It is entitled "THE SCHOOLGIRL FROM THE SKIES." Don't, on any account miss this splendid issue, for remember the first of our FREE GIFTS will be presented with each copy.