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No. 683, Vol. 27
Week ending
MARCH 10, 1934.

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ENTER—THE MORCOVE MONSTER!

A hilarious moment in this week's complete school story

"THE MORCOVE MONSTER!" BY MARJORIE STANTON

The MORCOVE MONSTER!



A Powerful Complete School Story, Featuring Morcove's Famous Fourth Formers

THE appearance of a mysterious object in the sea near Morcove—linked with certain strange happenings in the vicinity of the school—causes intense excitement among the Study 12 chums. Instantly and appropriately dubbed the "Morcove Monster," this peculiar object is destined to be the pivot of a thrilling drama vitally affecting Betty Barton and Co.

Out Together

"AND nothing more today, miss?"

"Nothing, thank you."

"Your change, miss!"

"Thank you. Good-afternoon! Hallo Dave!"

And Judy Cardew, of the Fourth Form at Morcove School, now that she had turned away from one of the bookshop-counters, smiled gladly at this surprise encounter with her brother.

"Judy!" he greeted her, in that quiet, fond way of his. "You finished here? I won't be a jiffy!"

"Right-ho, Dave! I'll be outside."

The old-fashioned High Street of thriving Barncombe looked very pleasant to Judy as she stood just outside the bookshop in bright sunshine.

Only vaguely was Judy aware of the picturesqueness of the scene, for she was really looking about for chums of hers who had come into town at the close of afternoon school.

Now that she had encountered her brother, she guessed, too, that he had made no lonely bike ride into Barncombe, from Grangemoor—that great public school for boys.

By Marjorie Stanton

Sure enough, whilst Judy still waited, she saw her own school chums—three in number—riding their bicycles slowly in this direction, with two schoolboy cyclists whose cap-colours were the same as Dave's.

Judy had just time to give an answering wave, and then Dave was at her elbow.

"Hain't got the book that I wanted," he remarked crisply. "You had tea, Judy?"

"Yes, Dave; and you and the others have only just got here Pity! If we'd known, we could all have got a cup together."

With a merry chiming of cycle bells, the five now slowed up and finally dismounted at the kerb. Polly Linton, that Morcove madcap, was affecting a sisterly unconcern over the meeting with her brother Jack, whom she secretly worshipped. To stress this bit of playful make-believe, she greeted Dave most sweetly.

"This is a pleasure, Dave! And it has been so nice to meet Jimmy, too—hasn't it, girls?"

"Oh, yeah," said Jack, refusing to be crushed. "Well, Judy, been making a loan to Dave? I hope so, being a bit spent up myself! No good asking Polly. Anyhow, unless my eyes deceive me, yonder is the Barncombe Creamery! So what about it, boys!"

It must not be supposed that versatile Jack was now addressing himself exclusively to Dave Cardew and Jimmy Cherril. It was part of Jack's hearty nature to treat his sister and any chums of hers as "boys."

"We've had our tea, but that isn't to say we wouldn't go back to the Creamery for a talk," Betty Barton now remarked blithely. "Only—I must scoot for Morcove now, if the others don't. I've an appointment with Ethel Courtway."

"Penalty of being a Form captain," Jack facetiously sympathised. "I well remember, boys, when I was acting corporal in the cadet corps—But I digress!"

"Do we fellows want tea?" Jimmy Cherril now submitted, and then his fresh cheeks rather coloured up. Possibly he realised that as no sister of his was of the party of Morcove girls, it had not been for him to appear eager to keep with them.

"Question is, can we afford tea?" Jack grimly asked. "Oh, I am not hinting, Polly—not expecting!"

"That's a good job," said she saucily. "You hear as often from home as I do, Jack!"

"But the remittances are not so good," he insisted. "No matter! All great men," and he drew himself up "learn to be, to do, and to do without! Boys of the Old Brigade, we will do without tea—we will; loud cheers."

"And ride part of the way home with us?" Polly inferred sweetly. "Well, there's no knowing when my back tyre may not go ping again."

"It is nice of you," was Betty's comment; atoning for the madcap's teasing attitude. "But don't all come along just for my sake!"

"We're not going to let you ride back alone," Judy said, with her usual earnestness. "Are we, Pam dear?"

"Oh, no!"

At the same time, tall Pam Willoughby conferred an appreciative smile upon Jimmy Cherril. Pam, who had no brother, rather liked Jimmy; and Jimmy, who had no sister, was all eyes for Pam. So, altogether, they were well met—these four girls and the three boys, now re-mounting to cycle straight out of the town.

Soon the covey of juniors had left all brick-and-mortar behind, and were on the open road to Morcove. That road, as it went on, gradually fell into line with the rugged North Devon coast, on one of the headlands of which Morcove's vast schoolhouse stood four square to all the winds.

Barncombe itself was a couple of miles or so inland; but Morcove scholars, on rough nights, could hear the roaring tide along the shore, under the giant cliffs, as they lay in bed.

The present spell of weather was a glorious one. There had been a great gale a few days ago; but this, having blown itself out, had left the sea rolling lazily under a cloudless sky.

"Where are the rest of your party, Pam?"

Jimmy Cherril, in making that inquiry, was voicing his surprise that only the four girls had been encountered in town. He knew that the Study 12 "chummyery" at Morcove School comprised some eight or nine juniors who usually went about together.

"Madge Minden wanted to get some piano proctor," Pam serenely specified, as she purred along with Jimmy to talk to. "Paula Creel had

washed her hair and was afraid to go out at once. Tess Trelawney, I fancy, went to the art-room. Helen Craig was going to tea in one of the other studies—a birthday."

"And Naomer?"

Pam gave her brilliant smile.

"Naomer had to stay in and do some lines!"

"Why, I thought," Jimmy exclaimed, "now that you've got that nice temporary mistress—Ethel Courtway, who is really your Head girl—"

"Anybody who thinks that Ethel can be checked, just because she is easy to get on with, is making a big mistake!" said Pam, sitting very erect as she rode with only one hand at the handlebar. "It's the mistake Naomer made, in class this afternoon."

Jimmy chuckled.

"I do like that kid," he said, in reference to Morcove's royal scholar, the girl queen of Nakara. "I never look at young Blood, at our school, without thinking of Naomer. There's a sort of—sort of—what'd you call it—"

"Affinity."

"Ah, that's the very word I wanted!"

Then Polly, riding only a few yards in front, with one or two of the others, looked round roughly.

"Are you two discussing your affinity to each other?"

"We are not," Pam smiled serenely. "We were talking about Naomer and Bobby Blood."

"You and your big words," Jack growlingly interposed. "What is an affinity, anyhow?"

"An equation," said Dave, using a rarer word than ever. "If X equals the appetite of Naomer—"

"Which is an unknown quantity!" nodded Polly. "Go on, Dave!"

"And Y equals the digestive capacity of Bobby Blood—"

"I get you," Jack hastily carried on the fantastic problem; "then the answer is—must be—cream-buns for two, whenever Naomer and Bobby meet in town."

Then Jack sighed.

"Gosh, why did I mention cream-buns!"

"Turn back, then," Polly wistfully advised.

"Nunno," her brother said stoutly. "Dave's enjoying being with his sister, even if I am not!"

Ha, ha, a nasty one, that, Polly-wolly!"

Polly's chin went up, but as her aloof look caused a sudden wobbling of her bicycle, she had instantly to abandon her dignity.

"Oh, and Jimmy's quite happy, too!" Jack drily commented. "There's all the 'T' that Jimmy wants in affinity. I say, I call that a joke, boys!"

"I call it dropping a brick," said Polly.

"But," she consoled herself aloud, "it's not far to where you have to turn off, anyhow. Race you to the signpost, Jack!"

"The favourite wins!" roared he, promptly huddling over the handlebar as he put on speed.

"Oh, boy! The world's fastest—see me!"

So there they went, the pair of them, making it a really spirited race, Polly leading. She had snatched a few yards' start before challenging Jack, and she kept the lead for at least half the distance.

Jack then overhauled her, on this nice, level stretch of road running between the lonely moorland and the grassy cliff-top. Very sportingly, he pretended to lose the use of one foot, riding on with that leg stiffly sticking out, thereby encouraging Polly to go in and win, after all.

But, as soon as she had drawn ahead again, Jack made good use of both pedals once more.

Those juniors who were coming on behind, in fits of laughter over the whole skittish proceeding, decided that there had been a dead heat at the signpost. When they themselves got to it, dismounting for good-byes, Polly and Jack were disputing volubly. But this, again, was only their fun.

"I can't argue—"

"Can't you! Seems to me a chap—"

"Good-bye, Dave; good-bye, Jimmy," Polly sparkled, "and when will you be this way again?"

"Boys, I tell you what—"

"How rude you are!" Polly censured her brother, who would not regard himself as extinguished. "And," to Dave and Jimmy, with an angelic smile, "do bring Bobby Bloot next time, won't you? Something about that boy I do so admire!"

"Gosh, if ever there was a whopper!" Jack gasped.

"And what would Naomer say, anyhow, if she heard you?" chuckled Betty. "But to-morrow is Saturday—a halfer—"

"Going to be fine, too!" Polly rejoiced, looking out to sea. "All our bad weather comes in from the Atlantic, and at present there is every sign of—Hallo, what's that?" she broke off, gazing harder.

"What's what, Polly-wolly?"

She did not answer, puzzlement evidently holding her spellbound. So the others all sent their eyes in the same direction—over the grass and beyond the edge of the towering cliffs, to the sunlit waters.

"Oh, but it's gone now," she announced at last.

"What has gone, Polly!" they all clamoured, for her recent dumbstruck state had left them greatly wondering.

"Funny," she said, and laughed queerly. "It looked to me like something swimming about that I've never seen before off this shore. I— It gave me quite a turn! Quite close in; only half a mile from the shore, at most—a long, black object, swimming slowly."

"Porpoises, Polly," smiled Dave; "several of them, following one another."

"Oh, no!" the madcap disented flatly. "I know porpoises! This, I tell you, was something I've never seen before."

"Had it a hump, Polly-wolly?" Jack slyly asked.

"Why, it did seem to have a sort of lump—in the middle of its back."

"Then that settles it! Boys, it's the jolly old Loch Ness Monster on tour! Polly's seen it, hump and all!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You give me the hump!" the madcap furiously informed her jocular brother. "Ape! None of you need believe me, and none of you need come! But I know I did see something very unusual, and I'm going across to—"

She caught her breath just there, then burst out in great excitement, pointing:

"There! There—look! There it goes!"

But her companions, peering their hardest, saw only the empty sea, aflash in the sunshine.

Polly's pointing arm dropped.

"Bother!" she murmured tensely. "Now it's gone again!"

What Did Polly See?

THEY all laid their bicycles upon the roadside grass, then ran hard for the edge of the cliffs.

Jack Linton, for the time being, was done with levity.

"Hang it all, boys! We ought to be able to see whatever it is from here!" he cried, during the eager rush across the springy turf. "We are a couple of hundred feet up, here."

"And I saw it—I did I tell you, plainly, from the road!" Polly strenuously insisted. She had a very human dread of being ridiculed. "Only what it does, it seems to me—it only comes to the surface for a moment."

"About half a mile out?" Dave recalled Polly's helpful remark. "Then it could not have been a submarine exercising." He said this quite gravely; he very rarely jested. "Much farther out to sea, it might have been one, and what you likened to a hump on the back, just the conning-tower."



Jack gaily took up Polly's challenge to a race, and a moment later brother and sister were leaving the others far behind.

"It was just there," Polly asserted, pointing to a patch of the sea that looked beautifully blue from this height. "A kind of streak of black, as if it were the back of—of some big animal."

"I can't see anything," Jack fumed. "Dashed if I can!"

"It might be a dead whale being washed in-shore," Dave reasoned shrewdly. "But, then, we'd see a whole lot of gulls flapping around."

"Baulk of timber?" Jimmy suggested. "Deck cargo, washed overboard during the gale the other day?"

Pam glanced at Jimmy as if this theory impressed her.

"But timber floats!" Polly argued. "It stays on the surface, and what I saw has—has gone down again."

"Then why doesn't it come up again?" Jack fairly raged. "Here, boys, I tell you what; down to the seashore, that's the idea—eh? See, it's only a minute's run from here to the zig-zag; the cliff path close to Cliff Bungalow."

"Not a bad idea," Dave nodded. "Down on the shore we could tell whether much wreckage or lost deck cargo is being washed up. If there is anything of that sort, then what Polly saw must be just a bit more coming in."

"I must go along to the school—I simply must," Betty exclaimed ruefully. "But you girls—you've no need to hurry back yet. Go with the boys—I would!"

"Then let's!" cried Polly.

"Our bikes can stay where they are," Judy remarked.

But Betty needed hers, and that meant her going back to the road. Otherwise she could have gone along the grass with her chums as far as the top of the zig-zag path that went down the face of the giant cliffs to the rock-walled beach.

She rode away, waving to them when they could be seen getting one behind another for the descent. After that, Betty put on speed for the last mile to Morcove School.

It was always reckoned to be exactly a mile from Cliff Edge Bungalow—a cliff-top residence, usually let furnished—to the school.

Until quite recently, the bungalow had enjoyed splendid isolation on that part of the rugged cliffs. Now, only five minutes away from the tiny marine residence, there was the up-to-date Headland Hotel.

Suddenly—bad luck! Ping went Betty's back tyre, and it was flat even before there had been time to pull up and dismount.

"Oh, bother!"

She knew instantly that she would be really late now for her appointment with the Form's temporary mistress.

Wheeling the machine, she walked on quickly. That was the far better thing to do, instead of delaying to try and mend the puncture.

Unluckily, no other girl came riding by, or the captain might have implored the loan of a machine to enable her to be, at the worst, only a few minutes late.

It was annoying, all the more so as Ethel Courtway, the acting-mistress, was such a "ripper."

Rather heated and breathless, the captain reached the handsome gateway just as Morcove's bells were chiming the half-hour.

"So I'll be quite a half-hour late by the time I get to Ethel's room!" was the grimaced conviction. "If that doesn't give her the right to be cross with me—and she won't be! Which makes it all the rotter! Oh, but here is Ethel!" Betty next instant realised.

A stranger would have said: "What a fine,

well-grown girl to be still a scholar!" For Ethel Courtway, sauntering towards the gateway, as if minded to go for a walk beyond bounds, retained much of the look of a scholar—a senior, but still a scholar for all that. And this was to her credit.

Some girls in her place, if asked by the head-mistress to act as a "stop-gap" mistress, would have lost their heads completely. But Ethel Courtway had been filling the emergency vacancy for several weeks now, without once putting on silly airs.

There was evidence of her easy-going disposition in the smiling comment to which she treated ashamed-looking Betty as they met just inside the gateway.

"Late, Betty!"

"I know I am—awfully late! And I suppose you have waited about indoors for me—had your time wasted—"

"Puncture, I see!"

"But I'm not sure that that excuses me," Betty's candour made her say. "I got down half-way home from town, with Polly and others, to say good-bye to the boys. We had met them in Barncombe. And then—oh, one thing and another—"

"More interesting than the one thing and another that we were to have discussed in my study?" Ethel blandly inferred. "I am surprised, though—the captain letting Form affairs go hang!"

"I deserve all you say," Betty acknowledged. "What I don't deserve is that smile of yours."

So Ethel put on a frown for once.

"And who is smiling now?" she demanded.

Betty burst out laughing, then.

"Oh, Ethel, it is good of you not to play steam!"

"Anyhow, I can't go into all those little matters now, Betty," came the light remark. "I have to be punctual, even if others are not! And I'm due at Cliff Edge Bungalow at a quarter to six."

"Oh, are you?" cried Betty, her brows going up. "Cliff Edge?"

The acting-mistress nodded affably.

"I've relations who will be staying there for a bit, Betty—"

"Well, fancy! We noticed that the To Let board had been taken down—"

"An uncle of mine has rented the place furnished for a month or two. He's my Uncle Peter—a frightfully clever man."

"What does he do, then?"

"Do? Oh, shuts himself up in his work-room, and—and—well, does things that nobody ever seems to hear about. Not even Aunt Janet knows quite what he does! He has come down in advance of her from London a letter to me said—to take over at the bungalow."

"So you will be seeing quite a lot of them!" Betty exclaimed. "How nice for you!"

"I shall be seeing quite a lot of Auntie J, when she gets here; but as for Uncle Peter—not so much," was Ethel's confident belief. "I expect he has rented the bungalow so as to have somewhere quiet to work. Betty, I must be off, and the next time you're late for an appointment with me—I had better," Ethel blandly decided, "have you to tea to-morrow afternoon; tea, perhaps, will help you to be punctual!"

"Oh, Ethel, you are—"

"Punctual? I try to be!"

And she stepped away briskly.

A high, swinging step it was that took Ethel along the road. There was athleticism in her every movement, the suppleness of a girl good at hockey, tennis, golf.

Yet these and other activities, including a passion for swimming, had not made her too muscular. Even allowing for her superior height, she was very slim.

Just short of a spot where Ethel would have been mildly surprised to find sundry bicycles "parked" beside that road, she turned in at the drive-entrance to Cliff Edge.

The residence was a modest-looking semi-bungalow; but it had its few acres of grounds—not at all well kept. As for the private drive leading up to the porch, Ethel had never seen weedier gravel.

"And Uncle Peter won't have much done to it, I know," she smiled to herself as she hobbled over the unrolled stones. "Don't make all that noise here!" she could imagine his protesting to an odd-jobber hired by Aunt J. "I want to work!"

Ethel reached the porch and set a finger to a bell-press that was badly tarnished. But the bell functioned, anyhow. Tr-r-ring!

After a full minute someone came to the door. It opened, revealing a tall, cadaverous man in shiny black. Ethel's smile, as for a faithful retainer whom she had known for as long as she could remember, drew no smile from him.

"Hallo, Dawker!" she said genially. "So you came down with the master! He is in, Dawker—expecting me?"

"Er—yes, Miss Ethel," the manservant responded impassively. "That is to say, miss, your uncle is on the place. But he went to a room that he is going to make his laboratory—"

"Oh, at work already!" Ethel laughed, stepping into the shabby hall. "Anyhow, you'll tell him I am here?"

"Certainly, miss."

Dawker closed the outer door, and the interior became more than dim. Gloomy was Ethel's word for first the hall and then the sitting-room to which Dawker conducted her.

He went away, leaving her to think:

"Dawker simply exudes gloom. That black tie of his! I never knew such a man. But I suppose Uncle Peter knows him, and he knows Uncle Peter. Pretty awful for auntie, though!"

Kept waiting, Ethel looked around, and was confirmed in the opinion she had formed, when the letter came telling her about all this. Much, much better if Auntie J. had come down first with a maid.

This bungalow needed a mistress and maid—at once. And why Auntie J. had not come down in advance of Uncle Peter, Ethel could not make out.

She knew her aunt as a woman who simply lived for her husband; a trying man, no mistake about that, and she had always been the splendid helpmate.

There were french windows to the sitting-room, but they opened on to a veranda with a tiled roof. So a good deal of daylight was obscured. A lover of fresh air, Ethel was at last going to



"I hope you will give the girls to understand that I want to be left in peace," Mr. Courtway surprised Ethel by saying, testily.

unlatch the french windows and set them wide open, when she heard a slow step outside the closed door.

But—strange man, Uncle Peter! Even now he was not coming in. He seemed to have hesitated and turned back to talk with Dawker. She could hear their two voices in a mumble-mumble.

Pity if Uncle Peter had become, since she saw him last, a little testy. He had never been quite that; quite the contrary.

At last the door opened, and Ethel could voice her long deferred:

"Uncle Peter!"

Then, in an altered tone of alarm, she exclaimed:

"Oh, at you—ill!"

It was six months since she had last seen him, and his looks were greatly changed for the worse.

"Er—I have been working rather too hard," he said flustered. "That is all—my dear."

"I'm so sorry, uncle. Is that, then, why you have rented this place on the coast—for the sea air? Aunt Janet did not say anything in her letter to me about your being in poor health."

"No, well—h'm—she doesn't know," he responded uneasily. "We have not seen each other for several weeks. I was in Sheffield—on business—and came straight from there to Morcove. We are only just in—Dawker and I—and we're not—er—ready for visitors—"

"You mustn't regard me as a sort of formal visitor, uncle," Ethel caught him up with a smile that she hoped would banish his haggard look. "I think I ought to scurry around and do a few things that Aunt Janet and the servants would be doing, if they were here."

"Ah, that—that is like you, yes," he nodded, forcing a smile to his thin lips. "You've always been a—very affectionate niece of mine; your Aunt Janet, always so glad to have you. But, let me see, I fancy you have your hands full at present, Ethel, at the school? Something about a position as temporary teacher?"

"The Fourth Form lost its mistress by her marrying a master at Grangemoor School; and arrangements that had been made went all wrong—as, of course, you and auntie have heard," Ethel added briskly. "So the Head asked me to take on, and I—just did so."

"A great honour—h'm—my dear."

She was noticing that he seemed most nervous when about to utter her name or an endearment. Strange! For in the past he had always been so easily affectionate. He would take, perhaps, a minute or two to shake off his concentration upon work; but after that he would be quite jolly.

A horrid fear shot through Ethel's mind that he was stricken with some illness of a grave nature. She remembered that such illnesses were capable of altering looks and speech alike.

"And you think you will like it here, Uncle Peter? The air, of course, is marvellous; and you have wonderful views—out to sea, and also over the moor."

"Er—yes," he nodded, still ill-at-ease. "So long as it is quiet enough. By the way, I hope the girls at your school are not given to swarming around?"

Ethel laughed reassuringly.

"Oh, I don't think you will find them a nuisance, uncle. They go by on the road a good deal, of course; but if you are thinking about the path down to the seashore—the school has its own zig-zag, only five minutes from its main gates. We always use that cliff path—"

"Listen, though!" He made the interjection with a distinctly angry frown. "I can hear some girls now—girls and boys!"

Irritably he crossed to the french windows, unlatched them and drew them wide open. He stepped out on to the veranda, but, before Ethel could join him there, he came back into the room.

"Yes," she said, having obtained a glimpse of the boys and girls as they ran to get back to the road, "they do seem to have come up your zig-zag, uncle. I call it yours because it sort of goes with the bungalow, like the boat cave on the beach, just below this bungalow. But, really, the zigzag is a public footpath."

"Need they use it if they have a path nearer the school?" he protested. "I hope you'll speak about it—er—my dear. Give them too understand I want to be left in peace!"

He looked at his watch.

"Er—I'm afraid I can't ask you to stay for any further talk, Ethel."

"Oh, that's all right, uncle. I understand; you're not straight yet. But Aunt Janet did ask me, in the letter I had this morning, to look in upon you to-day. She wrote that you were due to arrive about middle day. She will be coming down—soon?"

"Er—soon, yes. I don't quite know when."

"I shall love seeing her," Ethel exclaimed ardently, drawing off to the door. "Especially as dad and mum have had to go abroad, and have turned me over, as it were, to darling Aunt Janet."

"Yes—er—my dear; there's that, of course," she stammered, and nibbled a thumb-nail. "You are in our care for the time being."

"Not that I shall cause you any trouble, I

hope," she smiled. "At any rate, not until next hols. So good-bye for the present, uncle, and I do hope you will soon feel better."

"Er—thank you."

"A round of golf, uncle!" she prescribed brightly. "There's a good course this side of 'Barncombe."

"Golf?" he snorted. "Got too much work on hand to waste my time at golf. Er—good-bye, my dear, and—er—don't forget to tell the scholars!"

She nodded, letting herself out of the room; but there was her mental reservation that fair was fair! He must be reasonable. But, there, everything suggested that he was in a fagged and nervy state.

"Wants Aunt J here, to be seeing that he gets good meals," Ethel shrewdly reflected, passing out. "He never offered to kiss me, like he has always done. I hope he isn't becoming a bear—and Aunt J such a dear!"

Then, when another step or two would have taken Ethel clear of the gloomy dwelling, a feeble calling-attention cough caused her to halt and face round.

Sombre Dawker was hovering in the dim little hall. From his bloodless lips came the subdued inquiry:

"Everything all right, Miss Ethel?"

"Why, I can't say I think my uncle looks at all his old self," she answered. "Can you explain it, Dawker?"

"Overwork, miss, that is all," was the suave reply. "Your uncle has been studying up something very hard the last few months. I'm bound to say, miss, I see a change in him, although I'm always with him. But I am sure that that is all it means, miss; just the work."

Dawker coughed softly again.

"And if I might make the suggestion, miss," he resumed very deferentially, "you being a mistress at the school now, as I understand—"

"Well?"

"There were some boys and girls—"

"Oh, I've had all that from Uncle Peter," Ethel shrugged, rather impatiently. "Don't you begin, Dawker! Good-evening!"

And she found herself drawing a big breath of relief as she came out into the mellow sunshine of the early evening, and heard the skylarks singing.

BLACK-GARBED Dawker had closed the outer door of the bungalow. He stood deep in thought in the dingy hall, fingering and thumbing his close-shaven chin.

Suddenly the sitting-room door opened, and the man he served spoke anxiously from the threshold.

"No suspicion, Dawker?"

"None, I'm sure. Imagines you're ill, that's all. So that's all right."

"But is it?" was the uneasy retort. "She'll be wondering why, if I'm ill, I don't have a doctor."

"One of your little eccentricities—Mr. Courtway," suggested the manservant with a foxy smile. "As I've said from the very first, that's where our safety lies. You can't be too eccentric—Mr. Courtway!"

"This bungalow is confoundedly near that girls' school, with all its hundreds of scholars. To say nothing of the brand new hotel," muttered Dawker's master. "But I suppose we've done the best we could."

He turned back into the sitting-room, and Dawker went in also.

Strangely, master and man had nothing to say

to each other for quite a good while. Stranger still, the manservant as well as the master stood over by the french windows, looking through the rather dirty panes, out to sea.

"Look," Dawker's master suddenly fumed, "you can see Gull Island quite plainly from here! It looks confoundedly close to the mainland, Dawker—far too close!"

"It's a good deal the clear weather, after the gale of a few days ago, visibility—"

"But fine weather might, if it lasts, give us a haze?"

Dawker seemed to be all for allaying the other's nervous anxiety.

"Fine weather or foul, I reckon, myself, we shall seldom have it as clear as this. It is one of those rare evenings—"

"Dawker! Look!" was the sudden hoarse cry. "A mile out—there, catching the sunshine—"

"I see it!" Dawker panted with an agitation that almost equalled his master's. "What are they about, to be doing that?"

"Madness! They must be crazy, the fools!"

"But it's gone now," Dawker thankfully exclaimed a moment later. "Ay, and after all, even supposing it was seen by anybody, would they take it to be? A school of porpoises—or a bit of floating wreckage! Mustn't get jumpy!"

"We are running fearful risks, one way and another!"

"Ay! But, one way and another; we stand to make our fortunes, don't we? Here, let me be your doctor and give you something for your nerves!" Dawker leered.

And he turned away, leaving his master still in a quaking state—looking out upon the sea.

Fact or Fancy?

STUDY 12, at Morcove School, was seldom as quiet as this.

But, then, only Form-captain Betty Barton and elegant Paula Creel were here.

Paula Creel lolled in an armchair, blissfully enjoying the "wealome twanquility," as she had just called it. Betty, as usual, would make good use of such a rare interlude of peacefulness.

Betty was making captaincy jottings in one of her numerous memorandum books kept in a crammed drawer on her side of the study table.

"Hark!" Betty suddenly exclaimed. "That's Polly, I know—back at last with Judy and Pam. I'm glad they haven't hung about too long; it might have meant the boys being back late at their school."

It was a galling step in the long corridor of studies that Betty knew to be the madcap's. Judy and Pam could not be heard; but Betty presumed that they were following quietly.

In whirled Polly, and the captain smiled an eager:

"Well?"

"Nothing!" grimaced the madcap. "We were a good half-hour down there on the seashore, but—"

"You didn't see the monster again?"

"Oh, Betty, don't you start twitting me!" Polly pleaded, standing clear of the doorway to let Judy and Pam enter. "It's not my fault that I was the only one to see—what I did see!"

"A bit of floating wreckage, Polly?"

"Then why—why wasn't the beach strewn with other wreckage?" came the prompt retort. "You know very well, all of you—after a rough sea, if any ship has gone down off Morcove, or lost

some of its deck cargo, the beach is simply strewn with flotsam!"

"There can't have been any wreck during the gale, or we should have heard about it by now," Judy quietly remarked. "And the beach really was clean, except for the usual mounds of seaweed."

"Ah, seaweed!" Betty cried. "Had you thought of that, Polly? A mass of seaweed, floating—"

"Then why didn't it stay—floating? No," Polly rather heatedly insisted; "nothing you can suggest meets the case."

"Then, on your own argument, dear, it must have been a monster of the deep!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, laugh!" Polly shrugged, so that they did laugh all the more.

"Yes, wather," chortled Paula Creel. "Haw, haw, haw! Betty has been telling me about your wemawkbable apawpawtion, Polly deah! A freak of the fancy, yes, wather!"

"It's you who are the freak, with your hair like a birchbroom in a fit," Polly snorted. "Now, I don't want another word said. I'm not being believed! As for Jack—I'm done with him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I am!"—grimly. "He talked of coming over to-morrow with the other boys. I told him that I, for one, would not be at home to him!"

"They very nearly came to blows," laughed Pam. "But, to change the subject—as it seems such a dangerous one! Whoever it is who has rented Cliff Edge bungalow has a fine motor-boat—the latest thing."

"We looked in at the lattice gates at the entrance to the boat-cave that goes with Cliff Edge bungalow," Judy carried on the talk. "The boat was there. The boys longed to get a closer look at it; but the gates were padlocked, and, anyhow, that cave is private."

"And do you girls know who it is renting Cliff Edge at present?" Betty rejoined in a lively tone. "I was surprised when Ethel Courtney told me, just now. An uncle and aunt of hers—"

"What!"

"Bai Jove!"

"She was going across to the bungalow when I left her," the captain rattled on. "I fancy, only the uncle is there at present—with a servant, I suppose."

"But that," cried Polly, "is fine! Relations of Ethel's are bound to be rippers! And she herself is such a sport—she may be able to get us a trip in their motor-boat!"

"Not for me, thanks," came feebly from Paula. "I pwefer tewwa firma, yes, wather!"

"Paula prefers the 'terra' to the other 'terror'—the sea," Betty grinned. "Well, those who don't, needn't! But to-morrow afternoon is a halfer; plenty of time, too, after games! I wonder if—"

The captain broke off there, paying heed to a commotion in the corridor; but Polly calmly remarked:

"It's only Naomer!"

"She's excited, though!"

This was true enough. Next moment Morcove's royal and dusky scholar, Naomer Nakara, bounded into the study with such speed, she could not pull up in time to prevent a collision.

Either she had to crash into the table or, swerving aside, crash into something else. She did the latter, using an arm-rest of Paula's arm-chair for a buffer stop. Even so, Naomer's

momentum carried her over the arm-rest plump into Paula's lap.

"Womp! Ow—"

"Bekas," panted Naomer, as she came off Paula's lap and stood heaving for breath, "now to tell you all! Bekas, it was something wonderful, yes! It was mysterious!"

"What was?" several of them clamoured.

"And where—where? When?"

"In ze sea—"

"In the sea!" Eyes were whipped away from the dusky one's excited face to meet Polly's.

"Bai Jove—"

"Bekas, listen, everybody! Eet was after I had done my lines and after I had had tea, I came up here, to see if zere was anybody to be with, and zere was nobody. So I looked out of ze window, there, to see if I could see any of you. But—"

"Oh, get on, do!" Polly stormed. "You happened to look out to sea—"

"How do you know? Bekas—"

"You've said!" raved the madcap impatiently. "It was something in the sea! But how far out?"

"Ooo, ever such a long way; miles and miles—"

"What!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Half a mile?" Polly eagerly suggested, knowing Naomer's weakness for exaggeration. "Or only a little more, anyhow?"

"Yes—zat is about—"

"Then what did you say miles and miles for?"

"Bekas, eef you had seen what I saw, you wouldn't know what to say! Bekas, I tell you! Now I shall tell you—"

"Then tell us!"

"Eet was enormous!"

"What was, kid?"

"What I saw, swimming about in ze sea!"

"Swimming? Swimming, kid?"

"Bai Jove—"

"All alive-o, yes! And so," Naomer jabbered on, a-dance with excitement, "I looked and looked, and zen he went right under ze water; and so I waited and waited, and he didn't come up again; and so—and so at last I rushed downstairs and out of ze school, and down ze drive—"

"Oh!" Polly stamped.

"And across ze grass to our zig-zag, where it takes you down to the shore—"

"Yes, yes! And then—what?"

"And then I saw him again, yes!"

"You did!" gasped all the listeners.

"Bekas, I know I did, yes! He bobbed up again, he bobbed down again—enormous!"

"But what—what was it like?" Betty implored.

"How would you describe the—what you saw?"

"He was like—he was like— Ooo, I don't know," Naomer said helplessly. "Yes, I do! Like a beg fish—enormous!"

"Did you see its head?"

"No, bekas—"

"Did you see its tail?"

"No, bekas—"

"Then how," shouted Polly, stamping in front of Naomer, "can you liken it to a fish?"

"Widiculous to— Owp! Yow—"

"Zen don't you make fun of what I tell you!" Naomer stated her reason for swooping violently upon the elegant one. "Bekas, whatever eet was, I saw eet, any old how, and you girls didn't!"

"Polly saw it," said Betty.

"What ze diggings! Polly did?"

"Yes!" Polly herself responded. Grimly triumphant, she turned to Betty and the rest. "And now I hope you are satisfied! No more theories about wreckage and all that. I saw something SWIMMING! So did Naomer!"

There was a sudden lull in all the babel of talk, and a crowding to the study window, which commanded a good view of the sea, although the shore could not be seen, of course, that being at the base of giant cliffs.

"We used to have some field-glasses," Betty murmured.

"They're in my study, I fancy," Pam exclaimed, and ran to see if she could find them.

"Wonderfully clear evening," Judy commented. "You can even see Gull Island, out there on the horizon."

"But the light will soon be going," the captain said. "Too late now, or we might have gone out again. Could it have been a whale that has strayed into these parts?"

"Whatever he was, seeing him has made me thirsty!" Naomer now realised, and did a dive into that corner cupboard where Study 12 kept its crockery and its private larder.

Pam came back with the glasses. She brought in Midge, Tess, and Helen, to whom she had said quite enough to infect them with the general excitement.

But, although all took turns at surveying the sea with the powerful lenses, nothing of a sensational nature was glimpsed.

In a little while, the last of the lovely sunset light was gone, and then the ever-restless sea greyed over. Betty, who had been still using the glasses, closed them and put them aside.

Then, giving a little start of surprise at something she had discerned with the unaided eye, she snatched up the lenses again.

"Why, what? Can you see anything, Betty?" two or three of her chums questioned eagerly.

"Oh, no! I'm only watching two people—a couple of men—who have just come away from the bungalow. Now they've gone down the cliff path—"

"To the shore, at a time like this—nearly dark?" Judy marvelled.

"Yes, that's what surprised me," the captain said. "Oh, but I am forgetting; the cave belongs to them, as tenants of Cliff Edge. So very likely they have something to do down there!"

"Or are they going out in their motor-boat?" Polly wondered.

"To catch the Morcove monster?" said Helen merrily.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Something Like a Monster!

STUDY 12, that evening, did not enjoy any monopoly of the sceptical amusement over that mysterious object alleged to have been seen by Polly and Naomer.

The Morcove monster was proving the greatest joke the school had enjoyed for many a day.

Far from insisting that the madcap and the imp must have imagined everything, it was the teasing delight of a good many juniors, outside the Study 12 circle, to assert most gravely that they also had seen it—oh, yes!

Some of these romancers could even supply details, all of which, if put together, enabled such a monster to be visualised as outdid anything that ever wallowed in the primeval slime.

But bed-time was reserved for a real scream at the expense of Polly and Naomer.

Unbeknown to any of the chums of Study 12,

sundry juniors had spent a busy half-hour fashioning a monster that would, at the appointed time, bestow its company upon the dormitory.

Some old tarpaulin made a suitably shiny black hide for the fearsome creature. It was found that the arm of a black oilskin coat made, similarly, a very fine long neck when stiffened with a broomstick and suitably padded.

The head was to be the husk of a coconut, with two awful-looking holes for eyes, and a painted mouth.

An old umbrella, turned inside out, served splendidly for a webbed tail. When two juniors had, as it were, got inside the tarpaulin body, thereby supplying motive powers, the effect was voted to be "life-like."

So, at bed-time, the great joke was brought off. Speculative chatter about the Morcove monster was being encouraged by those in the secret. Artfully, these girls pretended to be talking very seriously, so that Paula Creel, at any rate, was becoming quite credulous.

"Good gwacious, geals, do you heah this that Biddy Loveland is saying? Theah weally ar monstrous cweatures that can—"

"But, listen!" came someone's agitated cry, from over by the doorway. "What on earth is that noise—just outside on the landing?"

Then the door swung open slowly, and the whole great roomful of girls beheld a huge round head, at the end of a stretched-out neck, bobbing up and down as if in apology for the intrusion.

Yard by yard—or so it seemed to Paula and a few other genuinely scared juniors—the monster advanced into the dormitory.

It had four legs, and it had two small humps on its back, each about the size of a girl's head. Its tail—its tail wagged violently, and was not instantly identified as an umbrella, turned inside out.

There was, indeed, a certain liveliness about the monster that prevented close inspection. Girls had to scatter to get out of the way of it as it flopped and writhed about—at first aimlessly.

Then those fearsome eyes seemed to pick out Paula, as she was timidly diving into bed, to draw the coverings right over her, head and all.

"Wow! Healp!" squealed Paula, realising that the monster really was coming for her. "Ow—geraway, healp!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bekas, gorjus!"

Naomer was dancing about in delight, but next second the monster had flopped about and was coming for her instead.

The tail flapped as if to supply extra motive power, the long neck swung the awful head as if to find a savoury bite, and Naomer—Naomer dived under the nearest bed.

It did not lessen all the shrieks of laughter when the monster itself was seen to be in a state of convulsions, due to merriment over its own antics. But suddenly:

"Girls, girls, what is all this! Oh!" was Ethel Courtway's bewildered cry as her further entry into the dormitory gave her a view of the mammoth. "Really, some of you!"

"This," Betty said blandly, "is the Morcove monster!"

"The what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Ethel herself had to join in all the renewed laughter. If it had been funny to see the monster whilst on the rampage, it was funnier still to see it now, suddenly expiring, as it were.

Its head had flopped to the floor, and its tail also had gone dead. Centrally, however, it still manifested signs of life—in spasms. There was

an inward struggle, transmitting itself to all four legs.

"Oh, come out of that, you two girls!" Ethel laughed at last. "What would Miss Somerfield say! Am I to be cross with you all!"

Some smothered squeals, from inside the shiny black skin, now caused Etta Hargrove to exclaim:

"Oh, poor thing!"

Again the dormitory shrieked its laughter. Finally, the owners of the two pairs of legs crawled out, looking half suffocated, and with plenty of tousled hair to mop to rights.

Ethel very considerably turned her back upon



"What is all this nonsense, Dawker?" Ethel demanded. "I'm very sorry, miss, but Mr. Courtway is too busy to see anyone at present," was the manservant's suave answer.

these prime culprits, who lost no time in dragging the collapsed monster out to the landing.

"Don't laugh, Betty!" came with an attempt at severity. "As captain, you should be ashamed of the whole foolish business! What started it?" the temporary mistress inquired, fighting hard to keep a straight face.

"Oh, it was only a take-off!" giggled Betty. "The Form has been hearing about a sea monster that Polly and Naomer claim to have seen, swimming about—"

"And so he was a monster—enormous!" shrieked Naomer, standing upon a bed so as to obtain a better hearing. "And anybody who laughs is only jealous!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Naomer, get down! How dare you!"

"But, plis—"

"I don't want to hear any more!"

Curiosity, however, overcame Ethel's sense of her position as the Form's temporary mistress. She was soon allowing herself to be bombarded with the whole story, merely begging the girls, if they must all talk at once, to talk softly.

"So, Ethel, what do you think it could have been?" she was asked at last. She was still "Ethel" to the juniors, except in glass and during all formal times.

"I must ask my Uncle Peter, over at the bungalow," was her laughed reply. "He will know! He's a great scientist!"

"Splendid!" said Betty. "And, whilst you are about it, Ethel, could you—"

"Could I what?"—genially.

"Ask him if he wouldn't like to take some of us for a trip in his motor-boat?"

"Check!" said Ethel. "But has he got a motor-boat, then? I didn't know!"

"Oh, yes—a beauty!" Polly said joyously. "We saw it laid up in the boat-cave. It's quite a big motor-boat, so he might find room for some of us, sometime!"

"I can see my Uncle Peter taking you girls for trips," Ethel smiled; and then, inwardly, she experienced a little pang of pain.

Her jesting words, after all, had contained truth—the rather disagreeable truth that Uncle Peter was not going to be kindly disposed towards the Form. His crusty hints that he wanted the scholars to keep away!

But, there; perhaps he would be feeling better in a day or two. The bracing air of Morocco would soon set him up. At any rate, she was not going to pass on those hints to the Form at this moment.

"To bed, there's good girls," she pleaded with that good humour which made it a delight to obey her. "I shall wait to turn out the lights, so hurry up, please."

Her good-night could not be for a minute or two at least, so she sauntered to one of the windows and, thinking of Uncle Peter, peered towards the bungalow.

It was a moonlight night and Ethel could plainly discern the solitary cliff-top dwelling against a background of shimmering sea. But there was not one lighted window. She concluded that Uncle Peter had retired as early as all this, and hoped that he would be in better spirits to-morrow for having done so.

"Good-night, girls!"

"Good-night, Ethel—good-night!"

And she was gone.

"Isn't she a sport, not to have made a row about that jape?" Betty Barton murmured in the darkness. "I say, girls, if we go down to the beach to-morrow, after games—suppose we ask Ethel to come with us?"

"Take our tea, to have it on the beach!" was Polly Linton's addition to the happy suggestion. "Ooo, gorjus! Bekas, our first peekneek this term!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You go to sleep, kid! I shall ring up Grange-moor in the morning," Polly announced blandly, "and ask Jack to be sure and come over with the others."

"But I thought," chuckled Betty, "you were done with him for ever!"

"So I was," said Polly sweetly. "But now I want to go for him again, about what I saw. Naomer's seeing it makes all the difference! Besides, I want him to be there, to see for himself, if it turns up again."

"IF!" came from several of the beds. "IF, Polly!"

After which there was considerable subdued laughter, proclaiming the Form's belief that it was a very big "IF" indeed! Nor did Saturday morning find juniors inclined to take the alleged visitation more seriously.

There was no rushing down to the seashore before breakfast. A search for "spoor" had been one of the joyful suggestions overnight; but by now the joke was stale.

Betty and Co., however, stuck to their idea of picnicking on the beach, and the boys would be there. Polly had rung up Jack, having no difficulty in obtaining permission to use the 'phone from Authority, in the person of Ethel Courtway.

It was hoped, too, that Ethel herself would be joining the party. Betty's sounding the temporary mistress about this had resulted in a most cordial:

"I will if I can—love to!"

But fate itself was to intervene there!

The chums, at half-past three that afternoon, were ready to start, with packed picnic-baskets and a string bag containing a kettle and sundry other utensils.

They were waiting, as arranged, for the Form-mistress to come out, when a stranger suddenly appeared upon the sunny scene urgently inquiring for—Ethel Courtway!

A tall, middle-aged lady it was, whose agitation so impressed the juniors as she came towards them to make that inquiry. They were wondering who she was, and why she looked so very upset, when she said rapidly:

"Excuse me, but I am very anxious to see my niece—Ethel Courtway. Shall I find her indoors, do you think, or has she gone out? I hope not; but I realise it is a half-holiday—"

"No; she is indoors—"

"Oh, I am so thankful! Then perhaps—"

"Let me take you straight to her; it will save time," Betty suggested. "As it happens, Miss Courtway—you know she is acting as Form-mistress now?—she was going to picnic with us on the beach. But, of course—"

"What a pity I have intruded like this," the lady deplored, hastening with Betty into the schoolhouse. "But most likely my niece can come along to join you later. I wouldn't wish to spoil the outing for her or you. Only, I—I am rather—"

"Yes, you have had an upset—we could tell. It's not—not an accident to anyone, I hope, or illness?"

"Oh, no, my dear!"

Betty made no further inquiring remarks, whilst conducting the lady upstairs to the first floor, where Ethel Courtway had taken over the room that used to be Miss Everard's.

Even as they got to the closed door, it came open in front of Ethel Courtway. She evidently had intended hurrying down to join the picnic party, but at sight of Betty's companion she stood transfixed.

"Auntie!"

"Oh, my dear Ethel, I am so sorry, but—"

"You came down from London this morning, then?"

"Yes, my dear, and—and—"

"I'll be off, Miss Courtway," the Form-captain interjected tactfully, "and we won't wait for you, of course."

There was only a half-attentive nod of approval from Ethel. She could not take her startled eyes off this loving aunt of hers, who had turned up

so surprisingly and in such a trembling state of alarm.

Banned From the Bungalow

"IN here, auntie darling—"
 "Thank you, my dear."
 "And this chair—"
 "Oh, I am so—so glad to sit down, Ethel!"
 "You poor darling auntie; you do look—awful! And why?" Ethel pleaded, after kissing a white cheek. "What's the upset?"
 "I caught the fast morning train and got through to Barncombe an hour ago. I took a taxi from there, my dear, to the bungalow—"
 "Aunt Janet! Oh—why? Nobody at home? But surely you let Uncle Peter know that you were coming?"
 "Yes. I sent the taxi away, never expecting, of course that I would need it any more. So I have had to walk from the bungalow to the school—and all my luggage still on the garden path, over there. I telegraphed my time of arrival, and that is the awful thing; he knows

I am here, and he is indoors at the bungalow, but—but Dawker would not let me enter."

"What! Dawker wouldn't! But, auntie, why didn't Uncle Peter—if he was indoors? Or is he in bed, ill?"

"No, Ethel. There again, it is so strange, so—oh, terrible, considering what your Uncle Peter and I have always been to each other. It seems as if—as if he— Oh, my dear, how can I say it!" the poor woman broke down, with a handkerchief at her eyes.

"You mean," Ethel whispered tensely, "he is—changed?"

"He doesn't seem to want me near him any longer—"

There was a long moment of thrilling silence. Then Ethel knelt down close to her seated aunt and would loving, comforting arms about a figure that shook with every suppressed sob.

"Tell me, auntie darling: is that what you are simply inferring? Or were you told—"

"In so many words, my dear, by Dawker!"

Ethel rose up, looking fierce.

"Somehow, auntie, I have never liked Dawker!"

"My dear, I am bound to say the same. If your Uncle Peter and I have ever differed about anything, it has been about that man Dawker. He has been your uncle's personal manservant for years, as you know, and in fairness he has been most devoted to a master who must have been trying, at times. All the same— Well, there, perhaps it needs a woman, whether old or young, to sense something in a man that is—wrong."

Again there was silence, whilst Auntie Janet dried her eyes and became more composed.

"I came hurrying across to find you, Ethel dear—"

"Quite right, auntie. Oh, I must stand by you over this. Let me think. You know, I went across to the bungalow early yesterday evening."

"And you saw your uncle?"

"Yes, auntie. He seemed—strange. Greatly changed, I thought. So altogether I really think, as I did so at the time, that he must be ill."

Aunt Janet stood up, with returning agitation.

"But, my dear! Dawker assured me that his master is quite well!"

"Auntie darling, when people are ill they sometimes say strange things—things they afterwards regret."

"That is so, Ethel. But your uncle has not turned against me."

"Oh, he hasn't? I understood you to say—"
 "Dawker's message, given to me at the porch, was an affectionate one. It implied no turning against me. I simply had to understand that I would be in the way at the bungalow; that your uncle's research work—"

"In the way! I like that," Ethel laughed mirthlessly. "When the place so badly needs the attention of mistress and maid! As for Uncle Peter's work; hasn't he always been a man to coop himself up in workshop and laboratory, and hate to be disturbed? But he has never said that you, auntie darling, were in the way!"

"I cannot make it out, Ethel; I simply cannot! How could I force my way past Dawker!"

"Surely you don't mean to say that Dawker looked as if he would bar the way in to you!"

"It was the impression I got, Ethel," was the quavered answer. "The man was apologetic enough—"

"Smooth; I know."

"But he did look—firm. He said he must obey his master's wishes."



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Cliff House School.

"Auntie, I must get you a cup of tea at once. Then you must please let me go across to the bungalow with you. Oh, it's perfectly absurd!" Ethel cried, forcing a laugh in the hope that it would allay anxiety. "You must be allowed into what is, after all, as much your home as it is uncle's. Will you come downstairs for the cup of tea?"

"My dear, it is sweet of you. What a relief it has been to be able to find you at once. One thing I want to say, Ethel dear," added Aunt Janet, pausing on the way out of the room with her niece. "We cannot have any scenes over there."

"Oh, no."

"If—if your Uncle Peter has taken a queer turn, Ethel, due to overwork, then we must be patient, tactful, that is all."

Ethel nodded.

"That's the line I sort of took yesterday, auntie. I felt at once that something was different. But I didn't hang about to irritate him. He was very jumpy, I thought."

They passed to the stairs together and descended to the ground floor. As a couple of parlourmaids were even then preparing tea for the few scholars who were likely to come in for it, a pot for two was instantly forthcoming.

Womanlike, poor Aunt Janet was a good deal restored by the welcome cup. Five minutes later she and Ethel were setting off to the bungalow.

"It is perfectly true, and I am hearing it in mind, Ethel," came the fervent exclamation, as they hastened along; "your Uncle Peter has been concentrating in the last few months to an extent that I have never known before. There is some big task in hand; some secret—a process, I suppose. He has never given a hint—"

"But that has not meant any breach between you, auntie?"

"Oh, my dear, no! We have always understood each other so perfectly." And, after a lengthy pause: "What shall I do if I can't see him now, Ethel dear, I just don't know—except stay around, of course."

"You'll have to get a room at the Headland, that's all, auntie. What do you think of Morcov's new hotel?" They were passing it as Ethel gave this cheerful turn to the talk. "Inside it is wonderful, auntie."

"Expensive, of course—must be. And I am afraid, Ethel darling, if your Uncle Peter goes on like this, I—I shall be in a fix for ready money."

Ethel, receiving this remark in silence, was none the less perturbed. It had reminded her that her own financial resources must now come through Uncle Peter's banking account. But she was not going to worry about that now.

"Here we are, auntie"—as they turned in at the gravelled drive leading to the bungalow. "I suppose places that are always being left furnished are bound to look neglected. Oh, there is Dawker, standing at that window."

"If only I could see your dear uncle, Ethel!"

"But you are going to see him. Oh, it's too absurd to be refused admission. And Dawker might have shifted your luggage." Ethel added sternly, as they went by it on the gravel.

"He hasn't come to the door, although he knows we are here."

"Let me ring," said Ethel, smiling at the ring which she meant it to be—an insistent one.

In a few moments, however, she was frowning again. Dawker was coming to answer the door, but only because she, Ethel, was refusing to take her finger away from the bell-press until he did come. That was evident.

Then, just as the door opened, Aunt Janet broke into tears again. She could not help doing so, poor soul.

"Now, Dawker," said Ethel, taking charge of the situation, "what is all this nonsense?"

"I am very sorry, miss; as I informed Mrs. Courtway just now, my master's wishes—"

"Dawker," Ethel cut him short, "there are your mistress's wishes, too! Is my Uncle Peter potty, that he can—"

"Oh, no, miss! Don't get any idea of that sort into your head," the man in black said, with his ghastly smile. "I do assure you, ma'am"—to Aunt Janet—"the master is in good health. It is only, I understand, that he feels too taken up with the work to be able to give you his company at present."

"You must let me in, Dawker!"

"Madam, I'm truly sorry, but I cannot. As a matter of fact, Mr. Courtway is out now. I can't say where he has gone, but he won't be back until after dark—I know that."

"After dark!" echoed aunt and niece together.

"If I may say so, ma'am, I fancy the master feels that this bungalow is—is too small to stand you and the two maids that you would be likely to have with you; not meaning any disrespect, ma'am. At any rate, if you could wait until after dark—so as not to make it awkward for me, like?"

"Come back then, you mean?" Fighting hard to keep calm, Aunt Janet consulted Ethel with her eyes. "Very well; I will do that. After dark I will call again, Dawker."

"Thank you, ma'am," was the bowed response.

"That would be better, I'm sure."
And the door closed in their faces.

This Is The Life!

"KETTLE'S boiling!"

"Ooo, hooray! Bekas—"

"Owch, owp!"

"Zen out of my way, duffer, when I want to bag a good place for tea, now zat he is ready—gorjus!"

"Kid," said Polly, in her best calling-to-order manner, "you're not going to sit there!"

"Yes, I am, and Bobby Bloot next to me! Bekas—"

"Healp! Ow-owp, gow! Betty deah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The usual thing! Even as Naomer could never be taken in hand by Polly in Study 12 without disastrous consequences to elegant Paula, so now that oft-teased junior was involved in a little scrimmage between madcap and imp.

"Hi, you two, stop it!" Betty gaily requested. "Your feet—sending all the sand over the cakes!"

"Dweadful!" wailed Paula, as she managed to get out of the way of the wrestling pair. "My life is one, long twial; weally it is! I— Owp! Oh, Jack—as someone saved her from falling—is that you?"

"It is I," Jack said, striking a heroic attitude. "The Smuggler King, har, har! And hearken, my lass!" Dramatically he seized Paula by the wrist. "See yonder horficer"—meaning Jimmy, who was approaching with some more gathered driftwood for the fire. "He is in the enemy's pay! Traitor!"

"Not so!" Polly took her cue, being just as versatile as fun-loving Jack. "He is my preserver!" And she ran to Jimmy, falling upon one knee and clasping her hands beseechingly.

"Oh, kind sir!"

The audience of picnickers being sufficiently amused to warrant the continuation of this im-

promptly drama, Jack now dashed "across stage" as if he wore scaboots and was altogether a hardened ruffian.

"Thou, varlet!" he ground his teeth at Jimmy. "So ye have crossed my path again, after all these years."

"Sorry, sir," grinned Jimmy, who had not the gift for acting.

"Sorry, ye say—sorry! Villain——"

"Hold!" cried Polly, grandly putting herself between them. "I am Polly Linton!"

"What!" gasped Jack, starting back. "Can it be? Then you—you are my long lost sister!"

"Monster!" But that word should never have been used; it was too topical.

"Monster—where?" Jack asked, turning to stare out to sea. "No, I still don't see it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Curtain," laughed Petty. "And now, before all the water boils away, do let's have tea."

The chosen spot for the picnic was a delectable one, half-way between what was called the Morcove zigzag and the cliff path that proved so handy for any tenants of the bungalow.

Close in under the heeeting cliffs, on a patch of smooth sand, the girls had spread a large white cloth, setting out cups and saucers, the teapot, timed milk and sugar, and a tempting array of eatables.

The fire had only been needed to boil the kettle. All the same, Jimmy cast on more wood fuel before he came to sit down with the rest of the juniors. A jolly blaze added a nice romantic touch.

"Nice desert-island feeling," Pam commented, glancing away to the fire as Jimmy sat down beside her, thus completing the happy circle. "Wouldn't it be fun if we all were?"

"Castaways? Down to the last biscuit," he nodded enthusiastically; but Naomer, close by, took exception to this realistic touch.

"Bekas, what ze diggings, we would starve!" "Nunno!" said Jack cheerfully. "We men would take our guns——"

"But you wouldn't have any guns. You'd be helpless," said Polly. "Otherwise, where would the fun come in?"

"Bows and arrows, boys! As for fun, that would come in one day when we found that cannibals had lauded and pinched Bobby Bloot, being a nice meaty one for the pot. At the critical moment up dashes our hero, handsome Jack Linton, the bravest boy in the camp!"

"The dance of the Form, you mean," said Polly sweetly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We'd be unlucky, being thirteen all told—like we are now!" said Helen Craig.

"Fourteen," Jack corrected. "Bobby counts as two."

"Fifteen," Polly amended. "Naomer counts as another two."

"It's all right, anyhow," laughed Betty. "The tradition is, thirteen at table. And there's no table. What a pity Ethel Courtway didn't join us. Strange, her aunt turning up like that!"

"Yes." They discussed the disquieting incident for a minute or two. Then Pam exclaimed: "Did we bring the glasses?"

"No, because—— Only cups and saucers!"

"Duffer!" cried Polly. "Pam means the marine glasses. They're in one of the baskets, Pam."

"Monster ahoy!" chuckled Jack, guessing that there was to be some scanning of the sea.

Next second, however, he was done with levity, rising up in some excitement. Nor could the others go on with their tea when, like Jack, they realised that there was a chance, if they all ran at once, to see the wonderful motor-boat put out to sea.

The private boat-cave, with its lattice gates, was just in sight from where the juniors were sitting.



"Clear out!" came a surly shout from the boat. "I won't have any of you youngsters meddling 'round!"

Now they saw that the lattice gates had been opened and that the boat itself was being run out on to the open shore.

"Gee, come on, boys!"

"Ooo, yes, queek! Bekas perhaps zey will take us for ze trip!"

And so there was a sudden rush to be in time to get a close look at the boat before it took to the waves.

Although only two men were handling the roomy little craft, they were getting her down to the water's edge very swiftly. As the juniors were soon to realise, a line of greased planks was facilitating the task.

And, hard as they pelted along the cliff-walled beach, they got to the spot only just in time to see the motor-boat set afloat in the yeasty shallows. They were too late to see the boat at really close quarters.

One of the men was already aboard her, busy in the cockpit, whilst the other—much more of a seaman type—was wading in great leathern sea-boots, the water washing about him knee-high.

The motor pulsed to life even as the boys and girls, at the end of their sharp run, formed themselves into a panting group of sightseers. The rougher-looking man of the two suddenly swung himself aboard with skilful ease, and the boat, only just afloat, began to glide away.

Then it was that the juniors came in for what seemed to them very churlish treatment.

They were doing no harm; they were simply showing an interest that should have seemed flattering. Yet the man in control, able to spare a moment now that the boat was dancing off through the inrushing wavelets, suddenly glared at the youthful onlookers, shaking a fist.

"Clear out!" he commanded, his voice thick with a passionate rage that was inexplicable. "I won't have you youngsters meddling around!"

"Meddling? Who's meddling?" several of them were not slow to protest. After all, what had they done? Did this churlish man consider them trespassers, just because they had run to this part of the foreshore?

The boat was going out at a gathering speed which evidenced the wonderful power of its engine. To make himself heard now, the man would have to shout—and he did so.

He hurled one last bad-tempered word of abuse at the juniors, above the brawling tide; and then he huddled down in the cockpit, returning his attention to the navigation.

"What a horrid man!"

"Wasn't he!"

"And do you know, I fancy he must be Ethel Courtway's uncle," Betty exclaimed. "I am surprised. I would have expected anybody connected with Ethel to be a real sport."

The boys were the last to take their eyes off the boat as it now cut through the waves, going at terrific speed straight out to sea.

"That's a boat and a half, that is," Judy heard her brother comment. "I'd have liked to get a good look at her engines."

"She's doing twenty knots, I know," said Jack. "Gee, just see her now, boys!"

But if that remark was addressed to the girls as well, then they were indispensed to pay heed. Morrove felt distinctly affronted by the violent churlishness of the boat's owner.

The boys might dawdle back to the forsaken tea-cloth, keenly discussing the wonderful little craft; Betty & Co. were for hastening back to resume the picnic without showing the slightest further interest.

Suddenly, however, several of the girls stopped

dead, noticing an intriguing object that had at that moment been cast ashore by the waves.

The juniors were all walking close to the foam-laced edge of the waters, and that which had caught their attention was left by a receding wave almost at their feet.

Polly pounced and quickly snatched up the object from the watery sands. It was a pocket-book, with the usual elastic strap to keep it from straying open. Although sodden through, it had not been so long in the sea that it was liable to come to bits.

"Lost overboard by someone on a passing vessel, I suppose," was Betty's remark, as she and her chums eyed the find.

"It's an extra good pocket-book—or was," Tess Trelawney considered. "Fine leather binding."

"Gilt edges to the leaves, too," said Polly. "Shall I open it? There may be the owner's name inside."

"Yes, and perhaps an address," chimed in Helen. "So we may be able to restore it to its owner."

So, very carefully, Polly unlooped the elastic band and then opened the book.

The leaves were all stuck together by being so wet; but she managed to turn to the first page, facing the front cover, where the owner would be likely to have written his name and address.

"Goodness!"

"Why, what, Polly?"

"This notebook belongs to Ethel's uncle!"

"It does? Never!" was the excited chorus.

"Peter Courtway—and an address in London."

"Then he must have lost the book in the sea, when he was out once before in that motor-boat," Dave promptly reasoned. "He didn't lose it overboard whilst putting off in the boat just now."

"Oh, no!" Betty nodded. "There hasn't been time for it to get so sodden through. Besides, it couldn't have been washed ashore as quickly as all—Hallo, here comes Ethel, just fancy!"

"Well!" And a few of them laughed.

It was such a happy chance, her having turned up like this, when they had just found the notebook, not to mention that they could hope to enjoy the pleasure of her company. The interrupted tea could begin all over again!

She had evidently descended to the beach by way of the Cliff Edge zig-zag, for she was clashing towards them over the shingle from that direction. She waved gaily; but there were those who fancied that she was not really in good spirits.

"Ethel!"

"Well, where's the picnic?" she inquired, with enforced jollity, as they all came running to meet her.

"Over there, Ethel," the captain answered with a very careless arm wave. "But, Ethel, something to show you!"

"Yes, bekas—"

"It belongs to your uncle, Ethel!"

"What!"

"Look!" And Polly, who had retained the notebook, handed it to the temporary mistress, open at the first page.

"Oh, yes, this is Uncle Peter's right enough," she said instantly. "And it has been in the sea!"

"A goodish while, we imagine," Betty nodded.

"Any rare, he can't have lost it just now, when he went out in the motor-boat."

They were surprised to find that this simple remark was giving Ethel quite a turn. She looked more excited now than she had when the notebook was handed to her.

"Just now—gone out in a motor-boat?" she said incredulously. "Oh, but you don't know my uncle; you can't be sure it was he!"

"We took it for granted," said Betty. "He seemed to be the owner of the boat, and it was brought out of the boat-cave that is always rented with the bungalow on the cliff."

"Describe him, will you?"

"Middle-aged; tall and thin; clever-looking. Not the bluff type of man you'd expect to be connected with the sea—"

"And jolly grumpy, eef you ask me!" shrilled Naomer. "Bekas, he shook his fist at us, yes!"

"Too late, Polly lunged an elbow into Naomer's ribs, to get her to hold her tongue about the churlishness. The dusky one had said it, and now Ethel Courtway looked more upset than ever.

"I—see," she responded tensely. "And that was only just now, you say?"

"Not ten minutes since!" Betty cried. "Look, there is the motor-boat; a long way out, but then, it does travel so fast!"

Ethel only glanced at the now distant craft, afterwards looking at the notebook very reflectively.

"I don't think I will go up to the bungalow with it at once," she pondered aloud. "Uncle Peter is away until nightfall, and— No, I shall not leave the book with Dawker. I would rather give it to uncle myself, later on."

"Then will you join us, Ethel, for the remainder of tea?"

"I will, girls, certainly. I came down to the beach to find you. So sorry the original arrangement was upset."

"Oh, you couldn't help that," said Betty. "Your aunt seemed to have had—an upset?"

The acting mistress nodded in appreciation of that sympathetic remark, but offered no explanation. A scamper by most of the juniors took them back to the picnic place, and soon Ethel herself was chummily seated amongst the entire happy party.

Its fun-making members were full of levity once more, and Ethel would have had to be in a state of continual laughter, even if she had felt less worried.

It was not the finding of the notebook that perturbed her. There seemed to her to be nothing in that, except the good fortune that the book could be restored to Uncle Peter by-and-by, after being lost in the sea by him during some previous trip in the motor-boat.

What puzzled and grieved her was that he must have been only a few minutes away from the bungalow when Aunt Janet was calling there. Dawker had spoken as if his master, at that time, could be nowhere as near as that.

But perhaps Dawker did not know that Uncle Peter had only gone down to the cave to have the boat out? Ethel frowned over this question. She was not feeling at all sure about Dawker.

"Oh, the glasses!" Helen Craig suddenly remembered, and, catching them up, she brought them to bear upon the motor-boat, by now a mere black speck upon the sunny waters.

"Do look, Ethel," she said, in a few moments, handing the lenses to the youthful mistress. "It appears to me as if the boat is making—straight for Gull Island."

"Gull Island!" Polly mused aloud. "I wish we could go there sometime! We have not been across to the island for ages, and it would be such a treat."

Lightly voiced, that wish of hers! As lightly echoed by many of the madcap's chums!

Yet that same wish was to be fulfilled, and only then would Ethel Courtway have complete understanding of much that, to-day, seemed to form a problem demanding an answer—a mystery she must solve!

"After Dark!"

THE failing light was compelling girls to abandon their last games on the playing-field, when Ethel Courtway came out of Moreove's schoolhouse, a tiny package in her hand.

It was the sea-soddened notebook, wrapped up in brown paper and tied with thin string.

"Betty!" she called, then smiled as, promptly, all the Form-captain's chums ran with that junior to meet her—Ethel—on the way down to the gates.

"No, not all of you," she announced affably. "But I have to go across to the bungalow, and Miss Somerfield would probably like me to have somebody with me. You're not too tired, Betty?"

"Tired! And such a lovely evening—the moon coming up!"

"Yes, wather, bai Jove; most wometric!"

"So can't we all?" Polly entreated.

"No!" with a firm smile. "At least—well, you can, Polly, just to make company for Betty! The rest—absolutely no!"

"Swendeel!" said Naomer.

But even she felt consoled, at heart, by the kindly smile that had attended the acting mistress' implacable decision. Moreover, there was to be added consolation for Naomer, in a resorting to the corner cupboard upstairs.

The evening certainly was one to make it seem a shame to have to go indoors. A soft, warm air fanned the faces of Betty and Polly and their acting mistress; moonlight was conquering the dusk of falling night, so that familiar objects that only an hour ago had been tinged with sunset hues were now distinguishable again, in a kind of silvery light.

"Your aunt's at the bungalow, of course?" Betty threw out, in a taken-for-granted tone, when the three of them were halfway.

"I—I don't quite know."

Awkward question that it had been for Ethel! But she had only to answer in a preoccupied manner and no more inquiries came. Study 12 could always take a hint, where personal affairs were concerned.

There was a light behind one of the bungalow windows; just that one square of red, caused by a lamp behind drawn curtains—an added touch to the romantic scene; the dark grassland of the clifftop, the lonely dwelling, and, beyond, a calm sea shimmering in the moonlight.

"If you two girls will just wait here for me?" Ethel quietly suggested, as they got to the roadside gateway. "Shan't be five minutes."

"Right-ho!"

Briskly she went alone up the weedy path to the bungalow's dark porch. Dawker had said that Uncle Peter would be in after dark; but the uneasy belief seized Ethel that she was too early. The place was so quiet—no voices audible. And only one room using a lamp.

She rang, and after an irksome delay Dawker came to the door.

"Oh, is that you, miss!" he smirked.

"I want Uncle Peter, Dawker."

"He's not back yet, miss, and I'm afraid he won't be back until very late. I had a telegram from him."

"Oh, had you?" She wondered how Uncle

Peter, out in the motor-boat, could have telegraphed—unless, of course, he had run to land somewhere up or down the coast. But the boat, when last seen by her, had been making for Gull Island.

"Can I take any message, miss?"

"I don't think so—no. I wanted to let Uncle Peter have this; it's a notebook belonging to him that he must have lost in the sea."

"What!" Dawker gasped, and offered to take the package eagerly; but Ethel stepped back, keeping it a-dangle by a string loop on one finger.

"I'd rather keep it, Dawker, and hand it to him when I next see him. Then I can explain."

"But, miss, I can give any explanation that you care to leave with me."

"I prefer to do as I say, Dawker. Your mistress, I gather, is not indoors. She has not called again yet?"

"Er—oh—yes, she has, miss. But I—er—I gave her to understand; it will be impossible for her to see Mr. Courtway to-night."

"Impossible? Why?"

"He will be back so late, miss."

Ethel Courtway Kidnapped?

IN dramatic fashion Ethel Courtway vanishes from Morcove School. The stirring events which lead up to her disappearance, and the subsequent exciting developments, involving Betty Barton and Co., make a most thrilling mystery and adventure story, which Marjorie Stanton has written for next Tuesday's issue of THE SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN, entitled:

VANISHED FROM MORCOVE



By Marjorie Stanton

Be sure to order your copy in advance.

"But I would like to know why Aunt Janet cannot wait for him here at the bungalow, as she must be wanting to do—up to any hour of the night."

The moonlight was managing to find Dawker's face in the dusky porch. To Ethel that face seemed now to be positively repellent. It was so odiously suave.

"All right, Dawker; good-night!" She said it brusquely, and walked away.

"Girls, do you mind waiting another five minutes, whilst I pop into the Headland Hotel? There's just time for me to see Aunt Janet for a moment—she is there, I imagine. Then we can get back."

"We don't mind, Ethel."

On the contrary, Betty and Polly felt they could very well have enjoyed a half-hour or more standing about the dewy grass of the cliffs, with the wide sea silvering more and more in the moonlight, and the moths flitting as if this were the first real night of spring.

"I suppose, Polly, her aunt and uncle are spending the evening at the hotel?"

"Rather jolly for them," the madcap nodded, "to rent the bungalow and be able to dine at the hotel now and then. But if Ethel's Uncle Peter is always as grumpy as he was to us, then I— Betty!" she broke off, greatly startled.

"Look!"

"Where? What, Polly—what?"

"Out there in the moonlight—about a mile."

"You mean," Betty breathed tensely, her eyes peering out to sea in the direction indicated by her chums pointing hand, "that dark object? But that's only a boat, isn't it?"

"It isn't a boat! No lights. Besides—watch it!"

"You're right, Polly," came a few moments later. "But what is it, then?"

Both girls were staring so hard, their eyes almost watered; staring fixedly at the "dark object," which was like something only just afloat in the sea.

"It's lying still, Polly."

"Yes!"

But in the very instant they agreed as to that, the vague shape moved.

As if it were the back of some sea mammoth they had been watching, so much of the mysterious object as was above the moonlit surface glided along whilst they still gazed.

Then, suddenly, it was gone; the Thing had altogether submerged, and the open sea was as empty there as elsewhere.

Polly turned to Betty at last.

"And now—now do you believe, Betty!"

"I do, Polly! Seeing 's believing, and we have both seen it together this time."

"The Morcove Monster," Polly whispered, "again!"

A thrilling silence; then Betty:

"We must tell Ethel about this when she comes."

"Yes."

BUT Ethel Courtway, when she rejoined them, had been crying.

They were sure of it, and she was very quiet, too, so that they felt it best to refrain from saying anything.

They could only wonder, every bit as much as they were wondering about that mystery of the sea, what Ethel's private sorrow could be—never imagining what thrilling parts they themselves were to play ere long in banishing it from her life!

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.