

"Morcove Makes Merry!" Delightful Holiday Story
By Marjorie Stanton

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**DAVE IS
WATCHING!**

A dramatic moment from
this week's complete
Morcove holiday story.

FOUR MAGNIFICENT STORIES WITHIN

Fascinating Complete Morcove Holiday Story

MORCOVE MAKES MERRY!



BY MARJORIE STANTON

SUDDENLY and dramatically the mystery of Dave Cardew's strange activities is made clear to all who are staying at Cromlech Manor. And, with the passing of that shadow of unhappiness, the Morcove and Grangemoor chums are able to give themselves up to the full enjoyment of a splendid holiday in novel surroundings.

CHAPTER 1.

Enemies in the House

HERE is a cup of tea, mother."
"What! Oh—thanks, Thelma."

This was one of the best guest-chambers at Cromlech Manor, for the mother of Thelma Curtis always demanded the best, even though she might be without the means of paying for it.

April sunshine was flooding in at the windows as Thelma set down the tray with its morning cup, at her mother's bedside. Thelma herself, who occupied an adjoining room, was fully dressed, but not with quite such care as she was accustomed to take.

"How did you sleep, mother?"

"Very badly!"

"Same here. It was not the going out of doors at midnight that dished me for the rest of the night—at least, it wouldn't have done

so if everything had gone all right. I never mind late hours. But—"

"You shouldn't have come with me, Thelma"—snappishly.

"Oh, well, mother, I felt I must be in at the finish."

"Finish! Anything but a finish, last night—"

"No, but we expected it to be, didn't we? And, anyhow, I'm sure I was right, mother," the girl sulkily insisted. "If there had been a chance at last, you would have found my help useful enough, up ther' at the reservoir. I've so studied up the thing, it would have taken me no time to do the trick."

"Well, the less said about last night the better now; I am not in the mood," said handsome Mrs. Curtis, sitting up in bed to sip the tea. "I hate failures. And when it comes to being balked again and again—"

Thelma, this tea is cold! Like everything else about the place—dreadful!”

“All those paying guests who came yesterday seem to be gone on the Manor. Most of them are down already, and I’ve heard them saying they couldn’t imagine a better country hotel!”

“Are you saying that to annoy me?”

“No, mother, of course not!”

“If I could only have had my way last night,” Mrs. Curtis raged softly, “those guests would have been packing by now, to be off. There would not have been a drop of water for morning baths, cooking—anything! And instead, everything is running smoothly. My own daughter calmly tells me that those people are delighted—going to stay on. Bah, I’m sick of being—balked!”

“Well, mother, I’ve done my best to—”

“We have both failed so far, Thelma; you may put it at that, whatever we have done. Trying to set people’s minds against the place; causing trifling upsets—all that is no use whatever in the long run. If the Delanes are to be forced to close down and let the Manor go out of their hands, it can only be done by the way I have had in mind from the first. The water supply, cut off—choked—”

Mrs. Curtis had to pause, as if she herself were half-choking with suppressed rage.

“We could have managed it so well, Thelma, the Delanes would have been faced with a bill running into hundreds of pounds to make good the damage. If only, whenever we have been up to the reservoir, we had not been forced to come back—nothing done.”

“That Cardew boy!” Thelma nodded, moving pensively about the room. “It’s amazing the way he has always contrived to show up at a critical moment.”

“It wasn’t the Cardew boy who forced us to rush back in the night,” Mrs. Curtis snapped.

“It wasn’t, mother?”

“Thelma, are you mad? How could it have been? Didn’t his mother send him off home last evening? He was asleep in his bed at home—a hundred miles away—when we crept out at midnight.”

“And yet—I don’t know,” Thelma muttered, standing still as the words came slowly. “It was only a boy that gave us last night’s scare—making us afraid to go on in the moonlight—”

“Some yokel; some country bumpkin! That was all, by his clothes. Out after rabbits, I suppose. But he managed to spoil that fresh attempt of ours—the last, I feel it had better be.”

“Mother! You can’t talk like that!” the girl exclaimed. “What, give up altogether? Then what is to become of us, when we’re in such low water?”

“Of course we can’t give up, Thelma; it is only that I am so—so annoyed,” hissed Mrs. Curtis. “That we haven’t succeeded by now. Oh, we shall have to try again, that’s all!”

“And I think, mother, by daylight would be better. This slipping out by night—it

does seem risky. Look here, shall I be on the look-out to-day for a chance, and if I get it—”

“No! You’ll be seen! Are you forgetting all those boys and girls who are staying here? Not to speak of yesterday’s fresh lot of guests. To-day the place will be swarming with—”

“Mother, you must think me a goop, not to trust me to keep my eyes open, especially where those kids are concerned. But I shall take the chance, if I get it,” Thelma announced with a daring smile, “so I warn you.”

“And I warn you, Thelma—”

“Oh, I know—”

“But listen; come back!” For Thelma was drawing off to the door. “Remember, Thelma! You and I are not in a position to answer any questions if ever the Delanes should receive information causing them to call in the police. We only took the name of Curtis six weeks ago. If the police persisted, acting on suspicion, they would be certain to find out who we really are!”

“As if I needed to be reminded of all that! I shall be careful enough,” Thelma declared, smiling vainly. “After all, I have done a good many things down here that have succeeded splendidly. So why shouldn’t I do this other—”

“It is something, Thelma, on a far bigger scale. It could never be overlooked as being a mere girlish prank. It would mean prison for me, perhaps for you yourself.”

“Right! I’ll chance it!”

And Thelma Curtis, after passing out, whistled a dance-tune as she set off downstairs.

It was breakfast-time, and a hum of talk came to her as she descended to the spacious hall, off which opened the large dining-room, now thronged with paying guests.

A stranger would have been struck by the big proportion of boys and girls. But to Thelma Curtis this morning there was the contrary impression of a much bigger proportion of grown-ups.

She had seen this same big dining-room yesterday morning, half-empty, and the occupied “separate tables” in the possession of schoolboys and schoolgirls.

The grown-ups were, in fact, those paying guests who had come in yesterday. They were in great spirits this morning, and for that reason Thelma felt some of the secret rage which would have been her mother’s, had that self-styled lady appeared for breakfast.

But Thelma had the Curtis table all to herself. After taking her seat and very airily giving a brisk parlourmaid her order, she glanced around in a condescending way.

“Morning!” she nodded to a certain school-girl and her mother, at the very next table to her own.

This was Judy Cardew and her mother. The schoolboy son, Dave, should have been there; but Mrs. Cardew had taken him to the station last evening, after a scene in connection with Thelma herself.

Full well Thelma knew how all the juniors at other tables had learned to detest her; but that did not prevent her from conferring false sweet smiles and purred "Good-mornings."

For their part, Betty Barton and her chums of Morcove School were quite ready to respond—just politely. They were rejoicing that so many new guests were in evidence. If possible, the girls wanted to avoid any unpleasantness.

An air of harmony does a great deal towards making visitors enjoy their stay at any hotel or guest-house; and Betty & Co. wanted greatly to see Cromlech Manor remaining full up.

Dolly Delane, whose parents had inherited the landed property without the means to support it, had been a scholar at Morcove.

She was a dear girl to all her former school-mates, and Mr. and Mrs. Delane were themselves "two of the best." So, out of goodwill to Dolly and her parents, Morcove had even done what it could itself to give Cromlech Manor a good start off as a private hotel.

The same could be said of the three boys who went hurrying out with the girls as soon as breakfast was over.

Hearty Jack Linton, brother of Morcove's madcap Polly; and staunch Jimmy Cherrol—they would do anything for the Delanes.

As for young Bobby Bloot, only in fun had he been told that he was doing his best to ruin the Delanes by eating so much.

Bobby, albeit a beefy youth, was the right stuff! Or would he have been a member of the holiday party?

"Hallo, clouds coming up?"

That was Betty Barton, with a little grimace, as she stepped out into the old-world garden with her chums.

"And the glass has gone down whallop, too," Jimmy Cherrol commented. "End of the fine spell, I suppose—worse luck."

"What a swizz!" said Polly Linton. "Just when the place is really packed out. What are all those new people going to do if it rains?"

"I know!" shrieked that dusky imp, Naomer Nakara, in between two bites at an after-breakfast apple. "Bekas, don't forget—dancing in ze barn! What ze diggings, everybody; didn't we clean out ze old barn and arrange him, all splendid, for dancing?"

"Aha, and I've got another brain wave, boys!" cried Jack.

"Out with it then," his sister Polly commanded; but as Jack liked nothing

better than being a sore trial to her, he now did his best to tax what little patience she possessed.

"Wait, mes enfants! Let me consider." And he stood with three fingers to his forehead.

"Yes—no! And yet, on further reflection—"

"Oh!" Polly stamped; but the others enjoyed seeing Jack in this pose.

"Supposing, boys, it rains before evening—"

"And it will," Tess Trelawney predicted. Her artistic eye was used to studying cloud effects. She was studying them now, very interestedly.

"The wireless, bai Jove, said something about a deep depression, approaching from the south-west," Paula Creel lamented. "Most twying of the weather to start bweaking up duwing the hols; most unweasonable, yes, wather!"

"In fact—sweendle!" said Naomer, throwing away the core of her apple. "But cheer up, everybody, bekas—"

"To-night at eight!" Jack now gave a clue to his brilliant idea. "All seats free to guests, and no Entertainment Tax! Boys, do you get me? Grand Cabaret by the world-famous Grangemoor Troupe—"

"Morcove, he means," said Polly. "But go on, Jack!"

"Including that talented artist, Mr. Jack



Dolly stood petrified. There, in the darkness, was a white face—and it seemed to Dolly like the face of Dave Cardew!

Linton, secured at great expense! Supported by—

"The Eight Morcove Bells," said Polly, silencing her brother by thrusting him aside. "Aha, we might call the Show 'The Belles of Morcove!' Anyhow, it's not a bad idea to get up a concert, to be held in the barn—"

"Gorjus!" capered Naomer. "Bekas, ze boys can soon make a stage, and we can have a curtain, and refreshments in ze interval—hooray! Now I hope eet rains like ze cat and ze dog!"

"Or is the barn roof leaky?" grinned Jimmy. "Howwows!"

There was just time for a laugh, and then stony silence came.

Thelma Curtis, flaunting out into the garden, was close by the grouped juniors. Mute and still they remained, refusing to notice her now.

They all detested her. But how much greater that detestation would have been, if they could have known!

If they could only have known—suspected even—that whilst they themselves were all for helping the Delanes to make a success of Cromlech Manor, Thelma Curtis and her mother were determined to bring the great venture to a ruinous close!

CHAPTER 2.

Won't It Be Fun!

"SHE'S gone."

"And good job, bekas—"

"Welief, geals, I must say!"

"I suppose she will be about all day," Polly said, with a black look. "But she spoilt yesterday for us; she's not going to spoil to-day!"

"We're going to try not to think of yesterday," Betty suggested, aware of how many faces had suddenly become mournful. "Worrying over that upset about Thelma and Dave won't do a bit of good. We wish he were still here with us, for your sake, Judy dear—"

"It's kind of you," faltered the sister of absent Dave. "But I'm afraid I can't wish him back here unless he could be just his old self again. It was spoiling the holiday for everyone—the way he was going on. But don't let's talk about it; try to forget it, as you say, Betty."

"Very well then," burst forth Polly, with desperate cheerfulness. "What about this concert stunt, then? In case guests get cooped up by bad weather, shall we prepare something?"

"Yes! Yes!"

The enthusiastic chorus did much to dispel the recent strong suggestion of gloom on Dave's account.

"Less preparation the better, I say," cried Helen Craig. "Oh, of course, we must get the barn ready, and all that, and rout out things to wear. But can't we make up the fun as we go along?"

"And the stage needn't be a grand affair, either," Betty supplemented. "Just a few planks on packing-cases, that we can clear away for dancing afterwards."

"Just in case people want to start dancing, half-way through the show," smiled Pam Willoughby.

"Oh, no! oh, dear, no!" said Jack, drawing himself up. "When they see what sort of a show it is, boys! Madge, at the piano— Gosh, we'll have to get the joanner across to the barn, Jimmy!

Besides, boys, we'll do a sketch for the second half—they're bound to want to see that."

"So long as I am not expected to paint scenery in time for this evening," Tess Trelawney remarked, fearing one of those big orders that she so often came in for at school.

"Oh, no," Betty laughed. "But I tell you what, Tess; if you could do a poster, to be hung in the hall—"

"I'll see." One needed to know Tess as well as her Morcove chums knew her to be sure that this diffidence would result, after all, in a fine bit of work.

Suddenly Polly did a little step dance of delight, clapping her hands.

"Oh, it's going to be jolly—"

"My idea, remember," said Jack, twirling an imaginary moustache.

"Your idea, greatly improved by us girls!" his sister would have it. "Let's get out whilst it is still fine, and then, if it sets in for a wet day we can have great fun getting everything ready!"

"A' Company, fall in for route march!" Jack bellowed, burlesquing a sergeant-major. "Privates Jimmy Cherrol and Robert Bloot, you are warned for fatigue duties, before and/or after lunch. Dismiss!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Come on, girls," cried Betty with some of the genuine gaiety of which the holiday, so far, had been deprived. "Let's get out whilst we can!"

"I shall stay in and get on with that poster," said Tess.

"And I," chimed in Dolly Delane, "must stay around to help mother!"

CHAPTER 3.

What Did Dolly See?

TESS TRELAWNEY had not been at work for more than half an hour—all by herself, as she liked to be whilst busy with pencil and brush—when she saw that it had started to rain.

That decided her not to black in the words "To-Night!" She felt pretty sure that her chums would decide to make it an afternoon performance, in which case the notice would have to read:

"TO-DAY, at 3 p.m."

It was a really artistic placard that Tess was working at. Colourful! There were lines of large type going in in pillar-box red, and other lines in vivid blue. Black and yellow were also creating very bold effects.

"How are you getting on, Tess dear?" Dolly Delane slipped in to inquire, presently. "It's pouring! So the others will soon be back."

"I want to get finished," Tess said, with her usual dislike of being interrupted. "I don't know what it will be like. I suppose we shall give the show this afternoon, as we can see what the rest of the day is going to be."

"A soaker, yes," Dolly deplored. "It was a ripping idea to think of something that will be a set-off for a wet day. Mother is simply delighted. We're practically full up, and she does so want people to stay on."

Dolly added, as she turned back to the door:

"If there is any more of guests suddenly asking for their bills and going off, then we shall be done for! It is awful to think that so many people lately have gone away—disgusted, you might say. We want people, when they do go, to promise to come again."

"I know," Tess nodded.

Such brevity did not sound sympathetic. But deeds are better than words. Dolly realised; 'Tess was doing a very great deal to HELP keep Cromlech Manor full up and so on a profitable footing.

Leaving the schoolgirl artist to revel in splendid solitude again, Dolly now went upstairs. In the main corridor there was a cupboard-like recess from which a narrow flight of steep steps led up to the lofts and attics.

As was to be expected in a house as ancient as Cromlech Manor, immediately under its vast and many-angled roof were some of the weirdest places, many of them almost pitch-dark.

At the top of the stairs came first a large, open area, showing the beams of the roof and all the mouldy packing of hay under the tiles. The house tanks were there, and Dolly could hear the water gurgling in at the supply pipe.

The attics themselves had to be reached over loose boarding.

Dolly had explored before to-day, and she knew that one attic contained a heap of faded house fabrics and even a few old skirts and dresses. Her idea was that some of these materials might come in useful for "dressing up," if they were fetched out in time to be shaken and aired.

The rain was beating hard upon the roof, just above her head, as she trod the loose planking. Gutters were gurgling, and she thought: "What a day!" And supposing her chums and Morcove and the boys had not been here at the Manor to live things up for other guests?

Dad and mother seemed to have come in for quite a nice lot of new "p.g.s." But could one expect them not to feel like going on somewhere else, if they became bored?

Cromlech Manor was so in the depths of the country, with no town amusements within easy reach. A glorious holiday place, in fine weather; but what was there to induce people to stay on during a bad spell?

But Dolly knew; those other guests had only to find the juniors making a spirited effort to keep things going to-day, and the effect might be wonderful.

It would all tend to make people feel that they were not so much paying-guests as friends all round, staying at a country house.

Work up a spirit of that kind—and Morcove and the boys hoped to do it—and then, rain or shine, contentment would prevail.

Such thoughts as these caused Dolly to experience such a wave of loving admiration and gratitude in regard to her chums, she fell into a dreaming state about them, after pushing open the door of that attic which she had reached.

Betty and all of them—how fine they were! As a matter of fact, the holiday so far had not been such a crashing success for them. Some long faces to-day might have been excused. That upset and bitter disappointment over Dave—all of them had suffered by it. And yet, the girls had kept smiling. As soon as they saw the clouds coming up, this morning, they had determined to make their own sunshine for themselves and others! No sooner had Jack mooted the idea of an indoor entertainment than all the others had—

Oh, what was that?

Dolly did not give voice to any such startled exclamation, but her mind was suddenly in a state of bewilderment—fright!

For, whilst standing in the attic doorway, musing about her good-hearted chums, a queer sound had come from somewhere in the darkness

that was in front of her. If ever there had been a window to the attic, it had been boarded up long since. She should have come provided with a candle.

But, if only because she felt ashamed of being so suddenly frightened by a sound that might, after all, have been made by a bird that had somehow got in under the tiles, she would not instantly retreat.

She even took a bold step or two past the doorway, peering eagerly.

Then a scuffling sound came again, and the extent of it seemed too great to be accounted for by even a big bird, such as an owl.

"Who's there?" she found herself saying, whilst her heart pounded loudly. "Oh!" she gasped, next moment, and wondered that she had not screamed aloud.

In a quaking state she backed out of the attic, having seen a—a face. At least, it had seemed a white something in the darkness, the size of a face, and there had been the gleam of eyes.

She peered in again.

Nothing!

Then she floundered away, to fetch that candle. She would come back with a light and have a good look. But now—perhaps because she was already in ample daylight again—she felt inclined to deride her nervous state.

A trick of the fancy, that was all! Oh, and she mustn't breathe a word about it, anyhow. Never do, to start a scare about ghosts, in a house as old as this.

Nobody believed in ghosts; but nobody liked houses reputed to be haunted! Once get the Manor labelled "haunted," and what earthly chance would there be of running the place for paying-guests?

She was back in a couple of minutes, carrying a lighted candle. "Now, Dolly, you've got to be sensible," she was saying to herself.

Holding the lighted candle at arm's length in front of her, she went into the attic. The little yellow flame flared in the draught; the wick smoked.

At a moment when it seemed as if the light must blow out, she knew how still keyed-up she still was. Could there have been somebody hiding here; somebody who had been forced to move, for fear of being blundered upon by her?

She advanced to that far corner where the face had seemed to show itself.

"No, nothing!" Dolly laughed. Well, of course there would be nothing—now!

"Oh, but I'm positive, it was only a trick of the fancy," she reassured herself. "I suppose it was because I was thinking about my chums—and Dave along with them. For—why, yes, come to think of it, the face I seemed to see was the face of Dave Cardew! How absurd!"

And after that she set down the candle in a secure place, and began to rummage amongst the heaps of old clothes and faded curtains and rugs.

CHAPTER 4.

The Hour Comes

"SIMPLY pouring!"
"Yes, I'm afraid there is no more going out to-day!"

A couple of the paying-guests were exchanging these companionable remarks as they came away from the Manor House cloak-room, after discarding dripping enacs.

"Hallo, what's this bill!"

"Oho!" said the other. "Come, that looks—
intriguing!"

Several other guests, who had been looking at the gaily-coloured placard hanging in the hall, turned to the fresh-comers with amused and delighted looks.

"Something about a concert, for this afternoon!"

"Really? Capital! Just the thing!"

"So there won't be any risk of our finding it dull after all!"

"Judging by this bill—no indeed!"

Starting with a line of bold writing, which began with "Owing to the wet weather," the placard suddenly broke into vivid hand-printing:

TO-DAY, at 3.

GRAND CABARET!!!

Special Variety Show by the
MORCOVE ENTERTAINERS,
given with the assistance of
THE GRANGEMOOR NIGGER
MINSTRELS!

All Seats Free!

At the Piano - - - Madgo Minden.

A Feast of Fun and Frolic
concluding with

THE GHOST OF CROMLECH MANOR!

Invented and Produced by Jack Linton
in collaboration with Miss Polly
Linton, the world-famous comedienne!

"Well, well!" laughed one elderly gentleman. "These young people to-day—ha, ha, ha!"

"Let 'em do it," chuckled another. "Nothing like a little enterprise."

But there was one "p.g." who, having rushed up a moment since to scan the placard, turned away with a scornful sneer.

Thelma Curtis!

"Stupid, I call it! They won't get me to sit in that old barn, to see them make idiots of themselves."

Yet the placard had given her a secret elation that made her race upstairs to find her mother.

"You've seen?" she laughed exultantly, after bursting into the room where Mrs. Curtis was moodily staring out of the window. "This afternoon, mother!"

"Oh, that concert by those girls and boys! Yes—a lot of nonsense."

"So I said, in front of some of the guests. All the same, mother," Thelma whispered, "doesn't it give us our chance—by daylight too!"

"Ah, I hadn't thought of that," came with a change to sudden excitement. "You mean, Thelma, if the concert attracts other guests—"

"In any case, would they be going out in the pouring rain? But, mother, those kids might have gone for a tramp, only they have made up their minds to give this show, all on their own. I've seen some of them in the last ten minutes; they can't think of anything else. Others are in the barn, I know, rigging up a stage and curtains."

Mrs. Curtis gave a decisive nod.

"Very well, then, Thelma; that will be, our last great chance—when the concert has started. I hope they won't wonder at our not being there?"

"Why should they? Pooh, as if we want to

waste our time, watching a lot of school kids show off. I expect it will be an awful flop. So the guests will be pretty peeved when it's all over. In the mood to grumble—"

"And with any luck, Thelma, it won't be long before we have given them something to grumble about. No water! The house full; people wanting baths before they dress for dinner to-night—and no water to be had."

"Mother, I may come with you when you go off, by-and-by, to—to do the trick?" Thelma wheedled. "Oh, you must let me! Besides, I know exactly how it can be done. I'm sure I could have done it before now, if only—if only that Cardew boy hadn't butted in, as he did, every time!"

"Well, we have not got him to reckon with this time, anyhow, Thelma," the mother remarked, with her sour smile. "You shall come with me."

"To-day, at 3," Thelma quoted from the placard downstairs. "He, he, he! It is such a scream to know; all those kids of girls, friends of the Delanes, have given us the very chance we wanted."

She laughed again, after getting back to the door.

"You know, mother, they are giving this concert simply with the idea of helping the Delanes to keep the guests contented. Yet the concert is going to help us instead of the Delanes. Isn't that too funny for words—he, he, he!"

NAOMER NAKARA, wearing an old sack as a cape to keep off some of the pelting rain, went galloping across from the Manor to the barn.

There was much hammering and banging, and a babel of talk, not to mention a musical accompaniment in the form of piano practice.

"Hi, all of you—queek! Bekas, dinner!"

"Oh, buzz off, kid—"

"But, what ze diggings, Polly! Din-ner, I tell you!"

"Can't be bothered; too busy! Here, Jack, if you want another plank, this one will—"

"Wowp, ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Always in the way," sighed Polly, swinging the plank in a different direction, after knocking Paula with one end of it. "Jack!" she yelled. "I can't hold this all day!"

"Spell-o!" cried her brother, who had been O.C. Works for the last hour or two. "Oh, boy, what a dinner I could eat. Of course," picking up his coat to put it on, "if you others prefer to go on—you can. How about you, Bobby?"

"The poor boy is perceptibly thinner," Polly said, casting off an apron. "Never mind, Bobby; you have done wonders I'm sure. Helping with that piano—"

"Slight mistake," Jack put in deferentially.

"I have no recollection of Bobby helping to carry the piano. I do remember his having it let down on his foot."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come on, then, dinner!" cried Betty, making ready for a dash through the rain. "Back at one-thirty for a dress rehearsal, all?"

Loud cheers!

"Oh, but haven't we pushed on?" Pam remarked delightedly to Jimmy, finding him close by her and looking back, as she was, at the makeshift stage. "With the few footlights we're going to have—fine!"

"But I can't act," seemed to be the thought that was worrying him. "Can't do anything."

"Oh, you'll be all right when the time comes," Pam insisted serenely. "You're not expected to



"A lot of rot!" was Thelma's scornful comment on the announcement of the cabaret. And yet, at heart, she was overjoyed, seeing in this a chance to further her own crafty scheme.

be another Jack, for making up nonsense; but you'll work in all right. Dave was like that. Such a serious fellow, you couldn't imagine him helping to make a farce go with a bang. Yet he was always awfully good—sort of foil to Jack."

"Yes, but I'm not another Dave even," Jimmy said, painfully conscious of that inferiority complex of his.

Pam turned to give him a full look.

"I'm glad you're not, Jimmy. Poor Dave though; I wonder what he is doing to-day—all by himself at home?"

The others had stormed away.

"How it is coming down now, Pam. I say, you have this coat of mine to put over your—"

"Don't be silly, Jimmy! Just as if one minds a drop of rain. But I'm glad the barn is water-tight. What have you done to that hand, Jimmy?"

"Oh, just scratched it; nothing."

"You must peroxide it, Jimmy. And be careful when you black your face for the nigger turn. Don't nigger minstrels wear white gloves? I can find you a pair. Stretch them and they'll go on!"

Jimmy smiled. At the same time he felt awfully proud. He was to wear a pair of Pam's gloves—Pam's! How chummy she could be to him, considering he was what he was!

Half an hour, and they were all back again at the barn.

By that time Morcove was expecting Jack to

say something about the great Ghost Fay—who was to be in it, and what the respective parts were to be.

But Jack only said:

"Oh, we'll make up something!" and went on with more stage carpentry.

Nor indeed could the girls exactly hold a dress rehearsal. They had first to devise dresses to wear—if possible.

Dolly Delane had certainly produced a wonderful assortment of old clothes, and bits of muslin, and a few ancient bonnets. But there was certainly no time for cutting out or adapting.

When Polly and one or two others, however, whilst taking part in the lively discussion of programme items, started to put on some of the things just as they were, it was unanimously decided: No need to bother! The more impromptu the dressing-up, the better!

"Bekas, see me make my de-butt, as ze Grand Patent Oriental Dancer—gorjus!" shrilled Naomer, whisking about in a pair of old lace curtains. "Queek, Madge; play something for me—lively!"

"Anyhow, I can be the Lady of the Manor, circa eighteen hundred and something," Polly declared, clapping on an old poke bonnet now that she had got into a quaint bodice and skirt, worn over her ordinary things. "Hoity-toity!"

"Zounds, madam!" shouted Jack, suddenly casting down a hammer with an idea of rehearsing, after all. "Gadzooks! I would e'en mistake thee for our own fair Paula, thou art so comely!"

"Fie upon thee, sirrah! As for Paula—ah, sweet child," Polly minced, clapping a hand to her heart. "But I am sore afraid for her happiness. She tells me that the bad Sir Jasper will e'en marry her, whether she will or no, alas!"

"Come on, Paula," Jack bellowed. "Forward! Your cue; enter Paula, the Squire's daughter. She is a comely wench—gosh, I must work in that word! How now, wench!"

"Er—er—what do I do?" faltered a very nervous Paula.

"Do? Rehearse! Can't you think of something to say," yelled Polly.

"Er—sowwy, I'm afraid I can't!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

ALL the intending patrons of the show were considerably leaving the youngsters to themselves at this time.

Meanwhile, conditions out of doors were going from bad to worse. The afternoon was darkened by the drifting over of inky clouds that let down their sheets of rain. The juniors did not know, but their early lighting up in the barn created a very pretty effect that could be seen from some of the Manor House windows.

Guests found themselves quite longing for three o'clock to arrive, and in good time there was a

scurrying across under cover of umbrellas, to find seats in front of the stage curtains.

At least there were sufficient chairs for the ladies. As for the men folk, Morcove could hear them making a great joke of having to accommodate themselves on benches, old milking stools, and even an upturned packing-case or two.

When all who were to be expected had come in, the great sliding doors of the barn were drawn together, to avoid the gusts of wind.

Very important the "fit-up" theatre looked then, with coloured lanterns burning here and there in the darkened auditorium, and the foot-lights sending up a strong light to the stage curtains.

The piano had been placed in front of and just below the stage. So when Madge came round from behind, to take her seat at the instrument, she was in full view of the audience.

A burst of clapping proclaimed the appreciative mood of all these seatholders.

Madge struck up. It was three o'clock, and Morcove had determined that, ready or not, they would begin the show prompt to the advertised time.

Three o'clock. And now, whilst the born musician of the Morcove "chummary" reeled off just the right medley of popular tunes, making the piano sound fine in that vast old barn, out of the Manor House came Thelma Curtis and her mother.

Out into the wind and rain they came, water-proofed from head to foot.

There was no one about to see them. They heard, feebly, some piano-music coming from the barn, and they noted now the barn-doors had been drawn together, to render everything cosy inside.

Had they been a minute or two later, they might have heard, instead, prolonged clapping and many a shouted "Bravo!"

But by the time Madge Minden was having to rise and bow to that unexpected ovation, at the end of her overture, Thelma Curtis and her mother were faring away for that hilltop where they were to do their cunning deed—at last!

CHAPTER 5.

At Last

"WON'T it be best for you to keep watch, mother, whilst I do the trick?"

"We will see, Thelma, when we get there."

They were almost to the top of the reservoir-hill now, keeping close to a hawthorn hedge. Not only did the line of ragged bushes screen them from the driving rain a good deal; it afforded a certain amount of concealment.

But there was nobody about—they were sure. Again and again they were casting their eyes this way and that, only to see the rain drifting like a fine mist across desolate undulations.

The darkness of the afternoon; the heavy rain, helping to make visibility poorer still—all was in their favour.

Even the outdoor work had been completely stopped, so that they had little fear of encountering some lonesome farm hand.

In any case, these hills were only fit for sheep, and Mr. Delane had not had time yet to put down a flock.

Mother and daughter panted the last few hundred yards uphill, exulting over their luck. They had this upland world to themselves; better

still, they knew that all their fellow guests at the Manor—adults and juniors alike—were congregated in the barn.

"Now!"

They had reached the reservoir. The grass-grown, steep earthwork, banking in the vast tank, was immediately in front of them, whilst a little distance behind was the small shed that housed the pumping plant.

Mrs. Curtis took the precaution of going to the shed and trying the door; but it was fastened up, and when she peeped in at the one grimy window she could see only the engine.

She returned to her daughter, looking better pleased than ever.

"I thought the pumps might be working to-day, Thelma, in which case someone might have to come up to give an eye to them. But—"

"No, this isn't the day for pumping. They only work the machines twice a week—I've noticed that. And now, mother, won't you keep a look-out, whilst I—"

"Very well, I will let you try first."

"Oh, I shall do the trick all right," Thelma boasted. "We know what we have to do. Get at the wire strainer that guards the outlet-pipe, and once we have done that the rest will be ever so simple."

"It should be. Go on then, and I will watch. Here—you will need this."

"Yes!"

That which Mrs. Curtis handed to her daughter was simply a coil of electric-light flex, with a small grapping hook fastened to one end of it.

Thelma tittered.

"Rather like fishing off the West Pier, mother! Well, see if I can't make a prize catch!"

She climbed the steep bank and in a few moments was working round to the necessary position for making a cast with the hooked line. The reservoir—as big as a pond—was uncovered, so that she had the surface of the pent-up waters under her eyes. There were little ripples caused by the wind.

Foot by foot she lowered the hook by unwinding the coil as fast as possible. She had paid out several yards of line like this before she could tell that the hook had touched bottom.

Then her "angling" for the wire strainer began. She was quite confident of soon hooking on to it. The strainer could be seen from where she knelt. It was a crude affair, but unless maliciously tampered with it was quite capable of serving its purpose for years on end. That purpose was, of course, to prevent any obstruction occurring in the outlet pipe that took water downhill to the Manor.

A choke in that supply pipe would be a most disastrous thing for the Delanes. The pipe went underground for the better part of a mile, to the house, and they would not know where the stoppage had occurred.

As Mrs. Curtis had considered, when thinking out this cunning plan, if successful, she might cause the Delanes to be cut off for weeks on end, and put to ruinous expense.

So now, Thelma angled away, trying to get the hook to grapple on to the strainer at the base of the reservoir. As soon as the hook held, she expected a good pull to bring the strainer away, and then nothing would be easier than to cast in stuff that would go down the outlet pipe, choking it.

The flow of water down the pipe would serve to draw in anything.

Mrs. Curtis waited below at the foot of the bank. She kept her vigilant eyes mostly in the direction of the Manor, down there in the valley.

The wind whistled through the dead stalks of last year's weeds; the rain sheeted across the wastes. Clouds were driving so low that for a few moments now and then the hilltop was fogged over.

"Can't you manage, Thelma?"

"Not yet, mother. Bother, I keep on thinking I've hooked it all right, and then it comes away again. We may have to bend the hook a bit more open."

"Here, let me try!" Mrs. Curtis exclaimed, starting to scramble up the bank to where her daughter crouched. "We can't be hours about it!"

At that instant the door of the pumping-shed came open a few inches or so.

A face peeped out—the face of someone who had been huddled down out of sight amongst the machinery, when Mrs. Curtis did her best

to peer in through the grimed window. The door came a little wider open—just wide enough to let a wiry figure emerge, very stealthily.

"THELMA, no more of your fiddling about and doing no good. Give me the line!"

"But, mother, I nearly—"

"Let me, I say! And you go down and keep watch, in case—"

"Oh, but I've got it, mother—I've got it!"

"And I," a voice startled them by calling out sternly, "have got—you!"

They both flashed round, at the top of the bank.

Then Mrs. Curtis uttered a gasp of panic, whilst Thelma simply screamed out:

"Dave Cardew!"

It was as if she and her mother were seeing the ghost of him; but it was he, right enough, in the flesh, albeit he was dressed in a working-lad's clothes.

"Come down from there," he said.

He could see that neither mother nor daughter held the line now. It had been in Thelma's hands, but it had dropped away when this palsied fright seized her.

They took their dilating eyes off him, to look at each other wildly. Mrs. Curtis was deathly pale.

"You had better do as I say," Dave Cardew insisted quietly. "The game's up, you know—Mrs. Laura Delane."

"What! How—how dare you!" she palpitated; but she was coming down the bank, with Thelma, obedient to his stern command. "Calling me—Mrs. Delane! You're mad!"

"Oh, no," Dave smiled. "You're a member of the Delane family—you married into it, I suppose. Mrs. Laura Delane, and your daughter—Enid Delane, I think?"

They tried to speak, and could not.

"I have been waiting—putting up with a good deal, to catch you in the act," he spoke so calmly. "And I think you will admit, this is—a clear cop?"

"Still I—I don't understand you!" the woman gasped.

"That's bluff, and it won't cut any ice with me. You have been staying at the Manor under assumed names, both of you. You are those distant relations of the Delanes to whom the property must pass, if they can't make a paying proposition of it. Mrs. Delane talked to me, the first evening I got to the Manor with my sister, about the conditions under which they had inherited the estate."

"I am not a Delane, either by birth or marriage! I am Mrs. Curtis!"

"Then why," Dave caught her up, with that calm smile of his, "are the initials L. D. on one of your handkerchiefs that you dropped, and I picked up for you, the other day?"

"Oh, absurd! If my laundry people have sent back a wrong handkerchief—"

"But that's not all," Dave struck in. "If your daughter is really Thelma Curtis, why is there a brass name tab on her golf bag—Enid Delane? You should have been more careful," he smiled, "to alter everything when you altered your names. Trifles like that—overlooked, forgotten—"

"Thelma, come away! This young—puppy—"

"Wait just a moment for me to say a bit more," Dave requested; and again they stood still, glaring at him.

"Have you ever looked through an old family



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album that is down there at the Manor? I have," he said "It was a few evenings ago that I came upon—this."

He displayed a photograph for an instant, then returned it to his breast-pocket, so that it should not get damaged by the rain.

"Portrait of you, Mrs. Laura Delane, taken years ago, when you had just your daughter's looks—allowing for different style of hair and all that. That was another thing that helped to convince me—Mrs. Laura Delane. Laura," by the way, is on the back of the photograph."

"Oh—fool!" she snapped savagely. "Come away, Thelma! The boy's mad!"

"I wonder what his mother will say!" Thelma panted. "When she took him to the station yesterday, to send him home by train!"

"Not quite correct," Dave remarked coolly. "My mother did take me to the station, certainly. But she never saw me into the train. What she did do, I may as well tell you, was to let me into the Manor House, late last night—when I gave the signal. Perhaps you heard an owl hooting? I know you were both awake at that time. I had seen you creep out—"

"You beast!" Thelma said, taking a stamping step towards him. "So it was you again, last night!"

"That's right."

"Oh, you—you—"

"Thelma," the mother interposed drearily, "come away. Don't demean yourself. I don't know what the boy has been about, I'm sure!"

"Only doing my best to save the Delanes, down there at the Manor, from being ruined by what you have been doing—trying to make it impossible for them to keep the place going," Dave submitted. "Like my chums, I'm fond of those Delanes. There's been a lot to put up with. I couldn't breathe a word to any of my chums—nor to my own sister even—"

"I'd like to know why!" Thelma sneered.

"You're both going to know why, straight away. It is one more thing I have to tell you before I let you go."

And the very power of his quiet voice did as much to hold the guilty pair in front of him as any batch of police could have done, had police been here to support him in this triumph.

CHAPTER 6.

"The Ghost of Cromlech Manor"

"BRAVO, bravo!" Clap, clap, clap! "Bravo, all!"

The first half of the juniors' Grand Cabaret had "gone with a bang."

Unrehearsed effects there had been in plenty. Madge had found herself playing one tune, whilst Moreove sang to another.

Naomer's "de-butt" had been a literal "flop" at the start, as she got mixed up in her wonderful "Eastern raiment"—the old lace curtains—when making her public appearance upon the stage.

Moreove had realised, too, that the make-shift stage was not as firm as it should have been for all the rushing about and the dancing that went with songs learned from school concerts. There had been a secret uneasiness—very acute in the case of Paula Creel—lest the whole thing should collapse.

But the stage had held up, in spite of much wobbling of supporting barrels. As for any hitches in the programme, the audience appeared to have enjoyed all these greatly, according

laughter and applause that was free from all derision.

Now, during the interval, there was a burst of delighted comment. What had the audience liked best, so far? Well, hard to say!

Some of those songs and dances by the girls had been exceptionally pretty. Oh, and the little African girl—meaning Naomer—her dancing, when she had overcome her first difficulties with the flouncy lace, had possessed the genuine Eastern quality.

Then there had been that song by Pam Wiloughby—a famous little thing out of Shakespeare, with accompaniment by Madge; really charming!

As for the Grangemoor Nigger Minstrels—what roars of laughter they had meant! It was hardly fair, however, still to call them the Grangemoor Niggers, for their performance had included a Morcove nigger!

Polly, she, of course, had been the one to blacken her face, at the last moment, and get into a capacious dress, suitably stuffed, that made her look a real "Dinah."

And now there was to be the sketch: "The Ghost of Cromlech Manor!" Madge was playing a lively interlude, but no doubt she would switch to suitable "creepy" music when the curtain was due to rise.

Hallo, there was one of the boys, coming in front of the curtain to remove two of the foot-lights, so as to darken the stage. It was Jimmy, with only half the burnt cork washed off his face. Give him a clap!

The audience did so, and he fled with the two lanterns, in great confusion.

"You know," one hearty gentleman in the audience turned to say to his equally delighted neighbour, "this little show must have meant fine team work."

"Rather! The whole thing done all on their own!"

In due time Madge got the signal that the stage was ready. She crashed off the last bars of the interlude, let a few moments go by in silence, then rippled off a few eerie notes.

The curtain rose—that is to say, two curtains should have flown apart, but one of them got stuck half-way and had to be tugged at hard before it would function properly.

But the audience had no time even to start a consolatory clap. Polly came on, dressed as "The Lady of the Manor," poke bonnet and all.

"Such a black night out of doors, and that shameless husband of mine not yet back from the Crown and Anchor! Oh dear, oh dear, why did I ever become his Arabella; why did cru-el fate make me the mistress of this lonely house!" With a shuddering look around. "Hark to the wind! And to think," sighed Polly, burlesquing splendidly, "that this is the night that the bad Sir Jasper comes, to claim our Paula's hand in marriage!"

The audience chuckled, and there was much elbow nudging of a "what-do-you-think-of-this?" nature.

"But hark!" Polly cried, starting up the moment after she had sat down, in a most pathetic state. "What is that sound I hear?"

It was the sound, off stage, of somebody letting himself in at an imaginary front door, on a wild night.

"Husband?" Polly called anxiously into the wings.

"Cheerio—I mean, how now, my Arabella?" came in Jack's best grown-up voice; the voice of

a roystering Squire. "Gadzooks, woman, waitest thou up for me?"

"How late you are," complained his long-suffering wife. "This night, at least, could you not have come away before closing-time?"

"Nunno—I mean, nay, nay! Woman," said Jack, swash-buckling about the stage, "there was a match with the dart board. Would you have me—ME, Squire of Cromlech Manor—refuse a challenge? But I beat him, yea, marry! With one throw of the dart—I won! And the prize, look you; the prize—"

"Something for me, my lord?"

"A half-ounce of the best shag!"

"'Tis ever thus," wailed Polly, sinking down with a hand at her heart. Ah, me, why did I ever marry him!"

"Well, why did you—woman? I never asked

"I mind me now, good wife," quoth he; "our Paula has never been cured of the fits. I have a hunch! How if she threw a fit in front of Sir Jasper—her, har, brainwave!"

"'Tis false, sirrah!" cried Polly, drawing herself up. "The maid is without rival, except for her squint. And that she gets from you!"

"That's right, start a row, just because 'tis Saturday night! But now, hearken, good wife; silence, prithee! Another wheeze! Yes, I have it, boys; Sir Jasper reckons to week-end with us. We will sleep him in the haunted room. We'll give the brute such a scare, he will be gone before the morning. And so the fair Paula will be rid for ever of this unwelcome suitor, this unspeakable, bloated, gourmandising mortgagee, who beat me last time at golf! But softly; who comes?"



Naomer came prancing into the barn. "Dinner!" she yelled. "Hurry up!" But she could scarcely make herself heard above the din that accompanied the preparations for "Morcove's Grand Cabaret."

you to! But come, supper! What!" stamping, "think ye that I can brook delay!"

"You forget!" And Polly rose majestically. "This is the night, alas, when the bad Sir Jasper comes to claim our daughter's hand!"

"Well?"

"Monster! Heartless father of so fair a child! Would you have her make a loveless marriage?"

"All I know is, this place is mortgaged up to the limit, and Sir Jasper holds the deeds. Where is the wench?" asked the Squire, reverting to old English.

This farcical switching from old-time speech to bits of up-to-date slang, including Yankee phrases heard on the "talkies," was a thing the audience were relishing greatly.

Meantime, they thought that Jack was wonderful in his sketchy get-up. He seemed to be all there as a bluff, rough squire of the "good old days"—wig and beard and all!

No one came.

"But softly," said Jack, a good deal louder; "who comes?"

"'Tis the child herself, sweet in-no-ence!" exclaimed the fond mother, ecstatically; but still the audience failed to see any Paula.

"Come, my lamb," Polly spoke towards the wings; "be not shy! Come on, duffer," was added, from closer to the wings, in a fierce whisper, whilst a voice off-stage was heard to urge:

"Yes, queek, get ze jerk on!"

Then Paula came on, looking as if she really might be subject to fits, stage-fright taking her at the knees.

Her appearance was all the more ludicrous owing to Naomer's having sent her on stage with a violent push that left a beribboned bonnet all awry.

Nevertheless, her adoring "mother" stood as if

struck by the beauty of the comely "wench," whilst the squire said, with paternal tenderness:

"Come hither, lass! Answer me, or odd's life, to the school-room ye go! What about it? Art willing to marry Sir Jasper Blooter?"

"Er—certainly not—I mean— Ow, father deah, pway do not be unweasonable! I—I—"

"I would rather die!" prompted a voice, from the wings.

"Yes, wather—much wather! I mean—"

"I would rather die!" the voice again prompted firmly.

"Pwecisely," faltered Paula, sending the audience into suppressed convulsions. "That is to say, I— Father deah, I scorn you—I mean, I scorn him, don't you know!"

"Zounds, wench!" roared Jack, hoping to give Paula more nerve; but he only left her more scared-looking than ever. "Then here it is, boys! The varlet shall not have thy hand in marriage, nunno! Out on Sir Jasper! But herk, I hear a horse!"

"'Tis he!" moaned Polly, wringing her hands, as someone off stage knocked two coconut shells together to create the effect of hoofbeats in the yard. "Alas! But courage, sweet child!"

"Er—mummy!" wailed Paula. "Healp!"

Suddenly, Sir Jasper burst upon the scene, and the audience beheld Bobby Bloot, his corpulent figure nicely filling out a frock coat of ancient cut. He wore knickerbockers and gumboots, and carried a riding whip. But he seemed to have left something behind, for he went back at once, and then returned, holding a fierce moustache to his upper lip, so as to give it more time to stick.

"Welcome, Sir Jasper!" the squire shouted, crossing over with outstretched hand.

That tiresome moustache of Bobby's came off against as he did some handshaking; but Polly saved the situation by exclaiming:

"How you have changed since I saw you last, Sir Jasper!"

As the villain of the piece, Bobby did his best to scowl.

"I am hungry!" he said. "Is this your hospitality!"

"Come, my lamb," Polly turned to a quaking Paula; "we will bring in supper. Our maids, Sir Jasper, always go up to bed at ten!"

Sir Jasper did not answer. He was treating Paula to a most ferocious glare as she made her exit with Polly.

"And so, Sir Jasper," said Jack hoarsely, "you have come about my daughter's hand?"

"Not on your life!" was the astonishing answer. "I have come about the mortgage! But supper first. Food, or I foreclose on the property, ah!"

At this instant a faint screaming was heard, from off stage. Then Betty, Pam, Helen, and one or two others, all rushed on, representing so many domestics in a state of utter panic.

Jack roared:

"How now, wenches!"

"Oh, sir; oh, sir—the ghost!" they screamed in chorus, showing every sign of palpitating alarm. "It is walking again! Wow!"

"Ghost!" gasped Sir Jasper. "What ghost?"

"This, Sir Jasper," said Jack, in a hollow voice, "comes of your being here!"

"Tush!"

"The mortgage!" Jack groaned. "We were warned! Any attempt to make us pay up, and you, Sir Jasper—yes, you!"

"This is true, Sir Jasper!" cried all the frightened maids. "Oh, flee, flee, whilst yet there is time!"

"I will not!" Bobby refused, taking a manly stride. "Ghost forsooth! Show me this ghost, and I will soon make short work of him!"

"Oh, sir, be not rash!" Pam implored, standing forward very prettily. "If you should meet him on the stairs, he would throw you down them!"

But Bobby would be as stout of heart as he was stout of figure, and in a few moments he was undertaking to go and look for the ghost, all the maids crowding after him to show him the way.

No sooner had he and they gone out than Polly came busting in, with a tray of supper things, which she crashed down upon the table.

"'Tis well!" she whispered to Jack dramatically. "I have got Jimmy the stable-boy to dress up as a ghost. We'll teach the villain a lesson, coming here to eat us out of house and home!"

Bang, crash, floppity, flop—thud! came from off-stage at this moment, as if someone were falling downstairs, whilst attendant shrieks went up.

Then Bobby re-entered, limping, and looking behind him as he walked, so that he walked straight into Paula, as she entered from the other side, with another tray.

The collision was most realistic, Paula dropping everything. And the audience laughed all the more when "Sir Jasper" let it be seen that he was really looking for his moustache whilst pretending to help clear up the smash.

"Oh, that's all right, old man," cried Jack blithely. "Did I hear you falling downstairs just then?"

"No, no!" protested Bobby, still limping badly, "I merely came down—in a hurry. I thought I heard you call 'Supper!'"

"'Tis ready, sir," gushed Polly, busy at the table. "If you will be pleased to draw up!"

"Whilst I go and draw the cider," said Jack, striding away.

Enter—the ghost!

Jimmy, in a white sheet, was a very palpable figure to the audience; but as he kept behind bad Sir Jasper at the latter's every movement, that heartless villain remained in blissful ignorance. He set a chair for himself and then, observing Paula, stepped up to her to look at her closely.

"No," he decided aloud, "she squints!"

So he went to sit down to supper, but the "ghost" drew the chair away, with results that drew roars of laughter from the audience.

Sir Jasper's inability to see the ghost was to be the cause of yet more, to him, astonishing happenings.

As fast as he attempted to appease that ravenous appetite of his, he was frustrated. The loaf was taken out of his grasp by an "invisible" hand. Knives and forks vanished. He sat back at the table at last, watching with bulging eyes the supernatural departure of everything, until finally even the white cloth was whisked away.

Then he smote the bare table with his fist.

"Food!" he roared. "Or I foreclose!"

Jack came rushing on with a jug so huge that the staggering conveyance of it caused further convulsions "in the stalls." But the best was yet to come.

Just when bad Sir Jasper was up from his seat in a really towering rage, all those domestics crowded on again in the same scared state as before, only more so. At which instant the ghost

flung the purloined tablecloth over Sir Jasper's head, draping him to his knees in white.

Then Jack "mistook" Sir Jasper for the ghost. So did Polly. So did all the servants! And now there was no fleeing in terror. On the contrary, Jack shouted: "We've got him, boys! On him!" caused a mass attack upon Sir Jasper.

He, apparently, unable to rid himself of the blinding sheet, had a terrible time of it now. He was chased about the stage, pelted and belaboured, toppled over, and hauled to his feet again.

Finally, he collapsed into a chair, with his head out of the white sheet at last.

In this state he looked so like somebody in a barber's chair, it could be understood why Jack asked:

"Haircut or shave, sir?"

"Moustache!" groaned Sir Jasper. "What?" "Feeling bare upper-lip." "Gone?" Then the ghost has taken that, too!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Have this, sir!" cried Jack, taking up the huge jug and pretending to souse its imaginary contents over the villain. "Oh, boy, what's this!"—suddenly flinging an enormous folded document from Sir Jasper's breast-pocket. "It is—it is! The mortgage!"

"Keep it, keep it!" groaned Sir Jasper, using the white tablecloth to dry his neck. "I'll vamoose—be gone!"

"And our fair Paula, sir?" entreated Polly.

"Keep her, too!" raved Sir Jasper, rushing away.

"Saved," said Paula very feebly. "Saved!" she yelled as Polly urged "Louder!" by a stamp of the foot. "Yes, wather! Hooway, goals—I mean, ladies and gentlemen—"

"Saved!" Jack and Polly vociferated together, whilst other players lined up with them for the fall of the curtain. "And so—"

A closing chorus! There could be no doubt that Morcove & Co. had even provided this feature for their patrons, for Madge was striking up, and the girls, at any rate, were all singing:

"We trust our bit of dance and song
Has not detained you here too long!
And as for all the fun and noise,
For that you must please blame—THE BOYS!"

And then the boys:

"That's what THEY say! But now let us
This question of the blame discuss!
Yet, no! Instead, ere we disperse,
Come, altogether, one more verse!"

So the final applause was still kept in suspense, whilst the entire troupe of juniors wound up with:



"What do you want? What are you staring at?" Thelma blazed out. "Well, as you're leaving we thought we'd just like to see you off," Betty said blandly.

"Ladies and gentlemen, as you know,
This was the purpose of our show;
Simply to pass a rainy day,
And if we've succeeded, why—hip, hip,
HOORAY!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Bravo, bravo!" and prolonged clapping. "Well done!"

Two of them rushed to draw the curtains together. All were then free to scamper away, hot and breathless, with much getting-to-rights to do.

But Polly, for one, remained as if transfixed. Some of her chums, after careering away, came back, wondering what had come over her that she looked so spellbound.

"What's the matter, Polly?" they clamoured. "Didn't you see?" she gasped. "When we were singing that last verse or two? At the back of the audience—Dave Cardew!"

CHAPTER 7.

This Is Strange

"**W**HAA-A-AT? Dave Cardew—"
"As large as life!"
"Bai Jove—"

"Polly! Impossible!"
"But I tell you it was! He was there, sitting with his mother!" Polly insisted, to their increased amazement.

"Ooo, queek! Let's look now!"
If Naomer, in a flash, was peering round the edge of the stage curtains, so were others. But

in vain they tried to discern that familiar figure which Polly had said she had seen.

Everybody in the audience had got up to pass out. It was a surging sway of full-grown people, some of them climbing over the plank seats, so that anybody of Dave's size stood a good chance of being obscured.

But Polly's fellow-players refused to believe that she had seen Dave. "Impossible!" was still the cry. She must have imagined him!

"I tell you—"

"No, Polly-wolly," her brother chuckled. "I tell you what; some chap like Dave, who has just turned up—a new guest."

"Rubbish! He's back!"

"But, Polly, how can he be? No, Polly—"

"Oh, all right, don't believe me, then!" the madcap shrugged. "Anyway, I want to get some of this make-up off first!"

"Yes, wather, bai Jove! Phew, goals, I'm nearly dead!"

"We must give the audience time to clear out," Betty grinned, "then we'll all scoot to get a wash—"

"Bekas, tea!"

"Sir Jasper can't want any," chuckled Jack. "Not after the supper he ate in the sketch!"

"Bobby was a great success," Polly declared. "I suppose the whole thing went all right? Did it?"

"You know it did, Polly!" laughed several.

"Bekas—what about me and ze encore zey gave me!"

"And Jimmy," smiled Pam, "was the one who was going to be a flop!"

Jimmy reddened. Such a delicately expressed compliment from Pam delighted him. And yet he could not believe he HAD been a success. To him, with his "inferiority complex," the thing was incredible. No, she was just consoling him for any blame to come from the others—must be!

"Well, the coast's clear now," cried Jack heartily. "So we'll slip across."

"Still raining?" inquired Madge.

"No—stopped! Hooray, such a lovely break in the clouds!" Polly yelled as she dashed with others into the open air. "Going to be lovely, after tea!"

Somehow, Pam and Jimmy were the last to leave the barn.

"Your white gloves, Pam." He displayed them. "I've ruined them. But I'll get them cleaned—or, I say, I wish you'd let me buy you a new pair to make up for these."

"On, as if they matter! I don't want them back, thanks. Fancy Polly imagining that she saw Dave at the back of the audience."

"She was thinking about him, I dare say."

Jimmy was folding the soiled gloves that he had worn for the nigger-minstrel turn, to put them away in his pocket—for keeps. He would buy Pam a fresh pair—but, no, better not. She might be offended. She might think it cheek. Anyway, she'd think him a silly ass—must do!

"Hallo, whose is the car?" Pam wondered, half a minute later. "Somebody just turned up? All that luggage at the back, Jimmy!"

"Or going away? Yet I don't see how that can be," he said, brisking up his step as she did so. "Everybody was at the show. Hope we didn't offend anybody. Perhaps I—"

"Oh, it would be your fault, of course," she smiled. "One of those jokes you made as Uncle Ebenezer."

"I say, don't remind me of—"

"Jimmy, you were all right, I tell you; just splendid. If you say any more I shall think

you're fishing! Oh, look, Jimmy! Of course, it's the Curtises' car—so they must be going off."

"The Curtises?" he cried in delight. "Going? But that's great!"

"They ran the last fifty yards to where, in front of the porch, the car stood, with luggage strapped on at the back. Most of their chums had paused there, on the way indoors. All were wearing too-good-to-be-true looks.

"Bekas," Naomer whispered Pam and Jimmy as they came up, "pipooray! Thelma Curtis and her mother—"

"But why?" Helen turned to invite Pam's opinion. "What does it mean? They seemed such sticklers!"

They were still wondering when Mrs. Curtis came out to the car, looking pale and angry. She got to her seat at the driving wheel with irritable haste and started up the car.

"Come on, Thelma—come on!" she called towards the porch. "Never mind if we haven't got everything! Come!"

Then Thelma came out to the car, shouldering a bag of golf clubs. The presence of Morcove and Co. seemed to render her frantic.

"Well, what do you all want! What are you staring at!" she blazed out. "Idiots!"

"Is this good-bye?" Betty asked.

"It looks like it, doesn't it?"

"Right, then; good-bye—"

"And we hope ect will be fine for you!" shrielled Naomer, scampering away.

Thelma slung her golf clubs into the car and scrambled in. Slam! went the door, and then the motor started with a precipitancy that created a smoke screen.

"Hooray!" Morcove cheered. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good-bye, and good riddance!"

"Yes, wather, bai Jove!"

"But why—why they should have gone off so suddenly!" Betty still wondered, aloud.

"I—I hope they've paid their bill!" Dolly Delane faltered. "They owed for a month, I know. I shall run and see."

But she did not run far. Nor did the others. The general swarming for indoors was checked suddenly—dramatically. They were just at the porch when they encountered someone coming out.

And it was—it really was—Dave Cardew!

CHAPTER 8.

Polly Is Penitent

FOR a moment it was as if they were all confronted with a ghost.

What made it so hard for them to believe even the evidence of their eyes was the fact that Dave, being here, was a Dave as cool and unconcerned as ever!

At last the blank amazement became vocal.

"Dave!"

"Bekas—what ze diggings! You went home!"

"Yes, bai Jove! Good gwacious, Dave—"

"Back, are you?" Jack clipped out. "Um!

Oh, well—"

"So I was right!" Polly now claimed excitedly.

"It was Dave I saw at the back of the audience

—"

"Oh, and I—and I!" came Polly's excited outburst, causing them to turn to her in fresh wonderment. "Up in the attic, this morning! I didn't tell any of you about it—I thought I'd better not. But I saw—a face—a kind of ghost

—"

"Goodness!"

"And at the time," Dolly rushed on, "it seemed to me to resemble—Dave!"

"It was I," that imperturbable youth now stated calmly. "Hiding there. You broke my sleep, Dolly, and very nearly dished me, too. Sorry if I scared you, but—"

"But what?" clamoured several of the girls astoundedly. "Dave, what have you been doing?"

"Setting your backs up, for one thing—haven't I?" he submitted. "You had good excuse for feeling sore with me—"

"But explain—explain!"

"Oh, it would take too long. And, besides—"

"All right, then, don't explain!" Polly cried in a fresh huff—and passed into the house.

She went pounding upstairs; then she seemed to feel the impulse to go rushing down again—out to Dave. Then she shook her head and stamped. No!

"Done with him, if the others aren't," she said to herself, going on to her room. "Too much I can never forgive—never!"

A few moments, and she was spinning the taps, to let the water course into the wash-basin. How lovely, to be going to get a good wash before tea! Nice to have such a plentiful supply of water, out here in the depths of the country. Sometimes the water supplies of such places were unreliable.

"Polly!"

She turned from the wash-basin to find that four or five other chums had come rushing in with Betty.

"Bekas—"

"That Dave—"

"I don't want to hear a word about Dave, girls! I suppose his mother has had him back. I can quite understand. But as for me—"

"Polly, listen—"

"I don't WANT to! But what, then?" she very humanly asked, eagerly.

"Dave," panted Betty—"the Dave we've all been so fed-up with—he has saved the Delanes from ruin!"

"Wha-a-at!"

"Everything—all his queer behaviour of late, Polly; due to just the one thing! Dave has been playing at private detective."

"And he has had a great triumph to-day—in the last two hours—"

"Yes, wather! Supweme twiump—"

"Bekas—gorjus! Piporay!" yelled Naomer, sitting on the edge of a bed to kick her legs about. "Eet is bekas of Dave zat ze Curtises have got ze bird!"

"Mrs. Cardew has told us; Dave was all for putting us off, but his mother came up and explained," Betty continued excitedly. "It seems, Polly, she didn't send him home last evening. She only took him to the station—and, after dark, he came back, on foot. He had confided in her as he simply couldn't confide in any of us!"

"Not even confide in his sister?" said Polly.

"No! There was a tremendous reason for that, and so we have no right whatever to be offended any longer. Now that we know."

"But what do you know now? You don't say!"

Such an impatient listener as Polly always made was not likely to make it easier for Betty and the these others to tell a brief, connected story.

But at last Polly knew. She had got the "hang" of the whole thing, and it was for her

to realise that of the humble pie which the "chummery" was due to eat, a large slice must come to her!

"There it is, Polly," her best of chums summed up. "We must see it as Dave wisely saw it at the time. He simply couldn't take action against the Curtises until he had got proof—had caught them in the act. You may think, at least he might have confided his suspicions to Judy, if not to us others. But he was right, you know, in the way he saw things.

"If he had taken Judy into his confidence, she would have known that he was acting as he was for a very important reason. So, when Judy saw us turning against him, she would not have been able to endure in silence. He reckoned—knowing how fond she is of him—that she would have been forced to let us into the secret."

And then it would have been a secret no longer," Pam chimed in. "The Curtises would have been put on their guard. Out of so many of us, one or another would have been bound to give a sign. As it was, Dave was able to lure the Curtises into believing that they were perfectly safe. At times he wondered if they suspected him, and so he was really glad to let them think that he had been packed off home."

"So if you still think, Polly, that he—"

"But I don't! All I can think is that I—I— Oh, out of my way, some of you!" Polly exploded, suddenly dashing for the door. "Ugh!"

"Hi, Polly! Bekas—"

But Polly was gone, pulling the door shut behind her—slam!

She went downstairs—wildly. No one belonging to her party seemed to be about. The boys, like her girl chums, were getting themselves to rights after the performance.

She wandered out into the garden, where the rain-sopped flowers were reeking in hot sunshine. There was a delicious fragrance in the rain-washed air. The grass had an emerald sheen. But—oh, hang! Even if others had been offended with Dave; even if his own sister Judy had been—

"But I'm a fine one to talk like that!" she said to herself digustedly. "Always the first—you know you are, Polly, to go into a huff! And now— Oh, here he is!"

She came to a standstill on a flagged path, then turned to go back, ashamed to face Dave. Quiet Dave, taking just a stroll round!

"Going to get some tea, Polly?"

"What? I've got all I want—all I deserve, anyhow," she said, advancing to meet him, after all. "Humble pie."

He held her by an elbow. "A cup of tea, anyhow, Polly, to help wash it down?"

"No. I'm looking for Jack, really—waiting for him. I am wondering whether—whether he and I—can't go home!"

"Now that I'm back?"

"That's right!"

Dave sighed then.

"Well, Polly, I didn't think I deserved—that, anyhow."

"Go away," said Polly. "Go away!" she stamped wildly, fetching out a handkerchief.

"Why don't you go away?"

"I'm tired of—not seeing anything of you and the others, Polly," Dave said, a little shaken at last. "I haven't had any sort of a holiday yet. I would like, now it's all over—that is, if you and the others can all understand to be the same as ever—"

"I shall always be the same as ever!" Polly wailed. "The same horrid, unfair, unkind, flying-into-temper wretch—"

"You're not to say such things, Polly. Look here, Jack isn't being like this. He's simply said a sort of, 'Sorry, old chap,' to me, and offered to shake hands, understanding."

"Then he ought to be ashamed of himself! And you did shake hands?" she asked, staring over her handkerchief. "But I can't ask you to shake hands!"

"Can't you, Polly?"

Then Polly cried as she had seldom, in her young life, cried before.

"I'll go away and come back in a minute," Dave said quietly and considerately. "I'm not going home again, Polly! And neither are you!"

"Dave," she entreated weakly. "But I—I'm better now."

He came back to her.

"Come indoors and get some tea, Polly, and then you'll feel better still!"

CHAPTER 9.

Evening at the Manor

DAVE was right. Was he ever wrong? Before tea was over Polly had become her madcap self again. If she was having words with Jack, furiously blaming him for the way in which Dave had been misjudged, that was only the old make-believe.

The entire "chummery" was itself again—as Paula expressed it, with a beaming look:

"Fwiends all wound, yes, wather!"

"And I tell you what it is, boys!" came Jack's hearty preface, as soon as they were all up from tea. "Let's get all the tables shoved together for dinner, this evening, and make old Dave the guest of the evening? What about it, boys?"

"Gorjus, bekas—a grand banquet!"

"Speeches!" sparkled Helen.

"And dancing in the barn afterwards," Betty furthered.

"Splendid idea!" Jack rejoiced.

And, being in the mood to do so, he made beefy Bobby bend down, so as to take a leap-frog over that ample back.

THAT evening Polly was Dave's right-hand neighbour at one of the tables. Nor did she fail to play her part in helping Morcove & Co. to enjoy itself.

The grown-ups could not be unmindful of the fact that the juniors were having quite a celebration.

By now, indeed, all Cromlech Manor knew what a dire catastrophe would have befallen the Delanes, if Dave, playing his lone hand—as he had been bound to do—had failed to unmask the Curtises.

So there was a good deal of amused looking-round from other tables at the Morcove happy circle.

Jack, called upon to make a little speech about Dave, cared not a rap that most of the grown-ups were giving their ears in great delight to his characteristic blend of grave and gay.

But what a surprise for the chums when, at the end of dinner, one of those other guests stood up, rapping for silence, to ask leave to say a few words—about that concert in the barn, and all that Morcove appeared to have done, to help their friends, the Delanes!

Soon the raftered ceiling was almost shaking with the ringing cheers that were being given—

for Betty & Co., and the boys, and above all, for Dave Cardew!

It was a glorious evening out of doors. The wind was down; every cloud had passed away, and by-and-by the moon would be shining in the rainwashed sky.

The barn had been hastily restored, a couple of hours ago, to its "ball-room" state. Again the Chinese and other lanterns burned prettily in the half-light. And now it was Morcove's crowning joy to know that all those fellow guests were coming across, presently, to take part in the dancing.

"You must come too, Mrs. Delane!"

"Ah, my dears, when I'm so busy—the house so nicely full! But perhaps—later on!"

Dolly's mother was rather emotional now.

"You've all been so splendid! What would have happened, if one way and another you hadn't stood by us so finely! As it is, Cromlech Manor is saved to us, when we might have been left without a roof to our heads! Cromlech Manor is not only going to be our happy home, but it is going to make, I'm sure—our fortunes!"

There was music sounding from the barn, even now.

"So run along, my dears, and enjoy yourselves!"

"Come on then, boys!" shouted Jack, scooting away.

"Come on, girls!" cried Betty, just as gaily.

"Yes, queek, queek! Hi, Bobby, bekas—first dance with me, don't forget!"

Bobby was not far away from Naomer, nor Dave far from Polly, it proved. But Jimmy—he was feeling he must keep away from Pam, this evening. She'd be fed up with him! "Besides, I can't dance."

So, in his evening "togs," he went to see if the calves had gone to bed nice and comfy on their beds of sweet straw, intending to drift into the barn after the dancing had started.

He whiled away five minutes like this, and then—

"Hallo, Jimmy!"

"Oh, Pam—er—going along to the barn now?" She nodded, and so there they were, going that way together.

"Only another week, Jimmy; I've been thinking. And then—back to school!"

"School's all right."

Pam nodded again.

"Everything is all right. That," said Pam serenely, "is how I feel to-night. And so do all the others, I'm sure."

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

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