

Complete "Morcove and the Mystery Gipsy" By Marjorie Stanton  
Inside

# The SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN

No. 687. Vol. 27  
Week ending  
June 16th, 1934

EVERY  
TUESDAY

2d



**A PRESENT  
FOR PAULA!**

A humorous incident from  
the fine complete Morcove  
School story within.

FOUR FINE STORIES WITHIN



# MORCOVE and the MYSTERY GIPSY

*The Chums of Study 12 Feature in This Powerful Long Complete Story*

AS the result of a motor accident Madge Minden is lying dangerously ill, and it is Morcove's fear that she may never again be able to play. . . . And to add to the consternation about Madge there is trouble concerning the activities of a band of gypsies who are encamped near the school.

## CHAPTER 1.

### Their Madge

"COME and look, Polly. What do you see over there?"

"Where, Betty?"

"Out there on the moor——"

"Oh, a camp fire? A tent or two——"

"Gipsies, Polly!"

"I think they must be. Yes! I can see a yellow van."

It was from the window of Study 12 at Morcove School that Betty Barton, the Form captain, was gazing along with her best of chums, Polly Linton.

Seldom were these two girls alone together like this. Apart from the fact that they shared the study with that dusky imp, Naomer Nakara, and also with elegant Paula Creel, they had other good chums always drifting in and out.

"Gipsies!" Polly repeated. "A bit too close to the school, Betty, for Miss Somerfield's liking!"

"She has no power in the matter," the captain responded. "They've a lawful right to be there on the moor. Besides, dear, I don't suppose they mean anybody a scrap of harm."

"Oh, no! I rather like gipsies myself," was the madcap's light rejoinder. "Often wish I were one! This time of year, Betty—must be rather jolly."

"I wonder! One is so accustomed to think of gypsies living a sort of glorious holiday-life—caravanning. But they must live, Polly! How do they live?"

"By making baskets and things, and selling them in the towns and villages——"

"For a few pence. Not so good!" Betty stated. "Anyhow, Polly, you and I, as gipsies, would need remittances from home."

"Once a week, without fail," Polly heartily agreed. "And what the Chancellor of the Exchequer calls a supplementary grant, in the middle of each week. Especially," turning round as Naomer whisked into the study, "if we had this kid with us! Thought so!" as Naomer dashed to the corner cupboard. "Hungry again!"

"What ze diggings, can't I have my usual apple before morning school?"

"Say apples, kid; always plural in your case. Not a cream-bun, but—cream-buns, and preferably ad lib. You can find one for me, kid—just one."

"Here you are, zen—catch!"

Naomer, in the cupboard, whizzed an apple so quickly that Polly, although a first-rate fielder at cricket, missed her catch. And the apple finished its flight by smiting pretty Paula on the head, just as she came drifting in.

"Owch! Theah you go again, with your fivivolyty!"

## By MARJORIE STANTON



Polly sang:

"I shot an apple into the air,  
It fell to earth—in Paula's hair!"  
"Yes," the madcap said, after this snatch of parody, "when I am a gipsy, Betty, I shall make my living by singing through the streets."

"You would soon be run in," Naomer sauced, and then closed her teeth into her apple. "Bekas—Hi, mind where you are pushing me, Polly!"  
But it was for Paula to raise any rightful protest, and she did so, at the top of her voice, now that Naomer had—not at all unwillingly—been toppled into Paula's lap, in the armchair.

"Gerroff me, ow! You fivoolous pair, you two! Betty, deah, when are you going to do something about these geals?"

"When are you going to move out of this study, Paula?" the madcap asked, sweetly. "Didn't I understand you to say—?"

"It will end in my depawture, and then you will be sowwy, geals! Yes, wather!"  
"You could not, Paula, be so cru—el!"

"When I am woused, Polly deah, I am woused! It takes a lot to wouse me—"

"It does. Especially in the morning. All I know is, you won't get another chair like that, in any of the other studies. See how nicely it rocks, on its three legs!"

"Bekas—!" yelled Naomer, giving the chair with the broken leg a violent rocking that capsize-d it.

"Yeowp! Gow!"

"Paula," the madcap addressed Paula, who was now sprawl on the carpet, "I have said before! In this study—mine and the captain's—"

"Yours and ze captain's!" shrilled Naomer. "Bekas, what about me?"

"You could be put out to-morrow, kid. The rent book has only to be shown! Not a penny from you this term! Hullo, girls; don't mind the dust."

Tall Pam Willoughby, Helen Craig and Judy Cardew were flocking in, as usual—to know what Study 12 was going to do. There was a good half-hour of free time yet, before morning school.

"Not possible for all of us to go across to the

san.. I suppose?" Pam said. "To see Madge?"  
"I'm afraid nurse would object to such a crowd, as early as this," Betty answered. "Yet it would be nice if we could get a word with her. Poor Madge! What cruel ill-luck that motor accident was!"

"But they say she has had a good night—that's one blessing," Judy remarked, earnestly.

"Yes," nodded the others, just as feelingly.  
"No set-back, so far," Betty added, thankfully. "But what a misfortune, all the same. Even to be laid up, at this time of the year, to say nothing of the injury to her hand and arm."

"Of all girls—Madge," came mournfully from Polly. "With her fondness for the piano. It is serious—"

"Extremely sewious for her, yes, wather."  
"What might prove nothing for another girl to have to bear may be a lifelong handicap to Madge," said Tess, tensely. "To be able to play the piano, you must have perfect hands."

"I read once that a famous pianist—now, who was it?" Helen pondered aloud. "Anyhow, his hands were insured against accidents for thousands of pounds."

"And even so, if he had met with an accident—just think of the loss that could never be made up to him by insurance money," Betty said. "His career—ended!"

A grave silence followed this.  
"Madge has met with this accident," Pam murmured, at last, "at what you might call the very start of her career. Even though she is still at school—she has won praise in public."

"Last week's garden party at Swanlake, for example!" Polly nodded. "How they clapped Madge! Oh, I do wish she had never gone to stay with Ivy Merrow, at Bracken Hill, this past week-end. Then they would not have had that car accident, when Ivy Merrow was driving her back to Morcove, yesterday morning."

Betty glanced at her wrist-watch.  
"I shall go across to the san. You girls all come with me. Nurse may allow us all in to see Madge. If not—"

"She will let you in, Betty, by yourself."  
"Bekas you are captain, Betty! What ze diggings, eef I were captain, I would de—mand eet!"

"If you were captain," Polly rounded on the dusky imp, "I should be the first to de—mand another."

"Would you!"

"Pardon?"

"I said—would you!"

Whereupon, Polly swooped, this being too much to stand from the "kid."

There was another little dust-up, with Paula somehow becoming involved. Extraordinary, how Betty and the others could pass out, unhindered, whilst long suffering Paula found herself being reduced, once again, to a dishevelled state!

Finally, Polly slammed both Paula and Naomer, one on top of the other, over the capsize-d chair, and hastily departed.

It was a haste, however, that did not enable her to rejoin the other girls until she, in the

open air, sped across the grass to the san. entrance.

Betty had gone in; the rest were all intending to wait about outside, for her reappearance presently.

"Nothing doing, Polly," Helen grimaced, in regard to themselves. "But nurse is a good sort really. She has let Betty go up to the ward, anyhow."

"I wanted to ask Betty to be sure and give Madge my love," Polly said.

"Oh, she will do that right enough!" Pam murmured. "She said she would tell Madge that we are all down here, wishing we could be at her bedside. Thinking of her all the time—when we are in school even."

"Thinking of her in the night, as I was doing last night," said Judy rather emotionally. "How one had missed the sound of her playing on the music-room piano, and how awful it will be if she never can play again."

"Our Madge," nodded Tess, looking pale and anxious, "who loved her music so!"

## CHAPTER 2.

### The Pity of It!

THERE was a smiled injunction for Betty Barton as Nurse ushered her into the bright little ward whose windows looked on to the Morcove games field.

"Five minutes, mind, and no more!"

"Right-ho, nurse!"

Injured Madge was at present the only patient in the whole spacious building.

From half-way down the aisle between empty beds Betty said a cheery, loving "Hallo, Madge!" to that schoolmate who was sitting propped up with cushions in quite the nicest bed of all—a corner one with a window close at hand, her right hand and arm heavily bandaged.

"Betty," smiled Madge delightedly. "Can't shake hands."

"No, indeed, you poor Madge, with that damaged right arm of yours. So I'm going to kiss you," Betty said, and suited the action to the word.

"But how do you feel, Madge, this morning? We were told you had a splendid night."

"Oh, I slept fine! I think the doctor must have put something in the medicine to make me sleep."

"Did it take the pain away?" Betty asked. "That arm has been painful, Madge?"

"Oh, it's easier now—much easier! Draw up that chair, Betty. This is such a pleasant surprise! Miss Courtway was across from the school-house before brekker. And Miss Somerfield has been to see me, too. But I didn't expect you, Betty. I was lying here, thinking 'Soon they'll be going into morning school.'"

"And you not with us, Madge. Last evening, when we knocked off from games and went up to the studies, how we missed you from Study 12! The others are outside now, Madge; they all sent their love, and do so hope you'll soon be quite yourself again!"

"Say I'm awfully grateful, Betty, won't you? From what nurse says, I shall soon be back in school, though I shan't be able to do anything much for a bit. I must have been simply flung out of that car, Betty, last Monday morning, for my arm and hand to have got so knocked about."

"Besides, you were senseless when they found you out there on the road across the moor. And Ivy not the least bit hurt! She had a wonderful escape!"

"I know. I haven't the slightest recollection as to what really did happen, and neither, I dare say, has she. We were coming along quite all right, when suddenly the car seemed to go wrong in the steering. It was all over in a jiffy."

"Madge, you might have been killed! But whatever was the matter with the car for it to behave like that? Ivy is a careful driver, isn't she?"

"Oh, yes! She's only been driving a few months—took out a licence as soon as her age would allow. But she seemed to be all right coming along."

Betty sighed.

"There must be accidents. But, oh, if only this one could have happened to—"

"To you, I suppose you're going to say?"

"Well, Madge, I don't do anything special with my hands. School work—and what does that matter?" Betty protested lightly. "Cricket, a bit of tennis, hockey in season, and that's about all."

"Is it?" smiled Madge, who knew the contrary was the case.

"I mean, Madge, I have no special talent there. I've no gift for painting, like Tess, or gift for music, like you."

Betty had not intended doing so, but suddenly she went straight to the point about her chum's injuries. She felt impelled to do so, partly because her loving anxiety was so great, and partly because Madge was so obviously ready for a frank discussion.

Her dark eyes, set in a clever-looking face, as she sat up with the pillows behind her, held the same sober expression which Study 12 always associated with its dear Madge.

Talented girl that she was—born genius, some said—and yet so free from the faults often manifest in clever people. Easy to get on with, this Madge; never irritable, never vain; always cheerful in her own staid way, and as free from envy, selfishness, as a girl could be.

"About the arm, Madge dear—the hand?" Betty suddenly asked under her breath. "There won't be any permanent injury? They can do such wonderful things nowadays, so it will be all right for you in the end. Oh, surely, Madge!"

Madge, whose injured right arm was in a sling; glanced down at it, then looked up, smiling into Betty's anxious eyes.

"There's a bone somewhere, a teeny one, it seems; if they can get that to rights, then I shall be to rights altogether. Only it will be a little while before they know, anyhow."

Betty's face worked emotionally; her eyes suddenly flooded.

"Madge dear, you know what we're all thinking; that you may be lying here fearing that you won't be able to play the piano again for a long, long while. But—but it will be all right, you see. They really can do wonders, miracles, nowadays—ever since the war, when surgeons obtained such tremendous experience. It's a bore for you to lie here for a bit, Madge; but it's only for a day or two. Then you'll be out and about. Grand 'celebration,' as Naomer calls it, in Study 12."

"You can find something better to celebrate than my return to school," Madge laughed. "Oh, and as to my not being able to play again, Betty—if that's what you and the others are worrying about—"

"Not—not worrying, Madge!" Betty blustered, out of her desperate desire to dispel any oppressive dread from Madge's mind. "Only fearing that you may be doing that."

"I'm not going to let myself worry, Betty. If it has to be, it has to be, that's all. And even if I

am unable to play again, I can always listen to others, you know."

"You're just splendid," Betty laughed, causing a tear to fall from either eye—dash!

She had come here wanting to be entirely happy-go-lucky, conveying an impression of cheery optimism. But it was all very well; when you were as fond of a girl as they were all fond of Madge—not so easy.

"And now I must go, Madge, or nurse won't let me in again—with the others, next time. So cheerio, for the present, dear. Anything we can do for you—get from Barncombe for you?"

"No, thanks, Betty. Thanks for coming. And you might tell Pam I want to hear her at the music-room piano this evening. She didn't play last evening."

Pam was a good pianiste, and was one of the few girls in the Form who resorted to the music-room of her own accord. Most of them had to be urged to keep up their playing.

"She didn't like to play last evening, Madge, with you in this state. I suppose your dad will be here again to-day? And perhaps Ivy Merrow will be over to see you."

Was it a twinge of pain in the injured arm just then that Madge's usually placid face seemed to suffer a sharp wince? Betty, noticing the wry look, came back to the bedside in quick sympathy.

"Madge dear—"

"It's nothing, Betty, and you must go."

"You'll be quite well soon, dear," the captain murmured comfortably, as she dropped a parting kiss upon the sufferer's forehead. "And now I'm going down to tell the others how well I've found you looking—strong. So that I'm sure the arm will be no trouble. It's only when people are delicate, Madge—and you're not that."

"Oh, no!"

Betty, as she went up the long room to the door, was constantly glancing back, wanting bedridden Madge to see her going away with a smile of gratification. But the captain, for her part, saw her chum only mistily. On the way down two flights of bare stone steps to the outer door she drew a finger more than once across wet lashes.

Then she was out in the morning sunlight, and the other girls were mobbing around, clamorous for her account of the brief interview.

Her own feelings told her what these other loving chums of Madge's were undergoing at this time, and she spoke as cheerfully as was possible. Again, not so easy, when her listeners were girls who usually shared her inmost thoughts.

At any rate, she succeeded in creating a more optimistic mood, resulting in a joyous demonstration under the windows of Madge's ward, with Naomer capering about as she added her own "Pipooray!" to the general cheering.

Then nurse came running out, clapping her hands as if the girls were a lot of geese to be shoo'd away. Study 12 made off, its cheering now



"Even if I can never play again, Betty—I can always listen to others, you know," Madge said, with fine composure.

changed to peals of laughter which, it was hoped, Madge would hear and enjoy.

IN the ward, when those sounds of affectionate relief had quite died away, and when Madge knew that all the school had now gone into morning class, she settled herself in a more restful position.

The talk with Betty seemed to have left the injured girl something to ponder as she lay here in bed. And at last, as a murmur to herself, there came the words:

"Why it happened—I think I know!"

### CHAPTER 3.

#### "Not Your Fault!"

STUDY 12 made a rush to Barncombe and back after morning school.

Sudden idea! Get some things for their invalid chum!

Never mind how well she was being looked after by the school authorities. Never mind all that her dotting father—a widower, and she was his only child!—might send along from Barncombe Castle, where he was agent for Lord Lundy. Study 12 must see what it could do in its own way.

It certainly did well. The best fruiterer's shop in the town was raided by Pam and Judy, whilst Polly and Naomer resorted to the famous Creamery. Many delicacies could be purchased at that counter suitable for an invalid.

The other girls dived into the best grocer's and the leading bookshop. Madge's taste in read-

ing was known, and books were chosen accordingly.

It was all a lightning piece of work; an errand of loving sympathy carried out against time. Betty & Co. had to be back in time for the gong at one o'clock. They were magnificently encumbered with parcels and packages on the run home, but half a mile from Morcove's gateway they were well on time, they knew.

Then came a check. It was one they might have avoided if they had chosen to harden their hearts. But they were not the girls to do that.

A young gipsy woman suddenly appeared to them at the roadside, asking appealingly:

"Buy a basket, young ladies? Buy a nice wicker chair? Do 'ee now help folk to get an honest living."

Morcove braked up and dismounted.

The young gipsy had several samples of her stock-in-trade with her. Two or three small baskets, of the waste-paper and gardening kind, she held out before her in an offering manner. In addition a really large wicker chair was dumped beside her on the grass.

"But we're almost spent up!" Betty smiled.

"Oh, not you, young ladies! Come now, do have one of my baskets, missies! I'll put them in cheap for you, I will, and think how useful they'd be now!"

"Paula, you'd better have that easy-chair," Polly chuckled. "You owe us a new one in the study, after busting the other."

"Bai Jove, it's pvetty cool of you to say I bwoke it! But I hev a good mind to purchase this chair, geals. Quite artistic, yes, wather!"

"Try it, young lady, do 'ee now!"

"She had better not," said Polly. "Once in the chair, we'll never get her out again."

The gipsy showed all her beautiful teeth in a smile appreciative of this jest. She was a really handsome specimen of the real gipsy tribe, with a look of honesty and fearlessness in her flashing dark eyes.

"Here, it's for Study 12, so we're all in this," Pam suggested serenely. "How much, please?"

"I'm going to be fair with you, young ladies, for you're kind, I can tell. Ah, there's not much I can't tell in a flash by looking at folk! Three half-crowns, young ladies, and if you'll think o' all the work that's gone into the making of that chair— Oh, thank 'ee, young lady!"

For Pam, with the help of some hastily collected sixpences from some of the other girls, was already tendering the money. No beating down—a fact that obviously delighted the gipsy.

"Good luck go with you all, young ladies all! Ah, if all the world were like you! And now can I just sell you one or two o' these little baskets?"

"Oh, no!" Betty laughed. "Some other time, perhaps."

"Take the chair, Paula," said Polly sweetly.

"Ev—pawdon?"

"Pick it up! You'll be the one to monopolise it, so you can be the one to carry it to the school!"

So saying, Polly thrust the chair at Paula, while the others voiced approval.

"Widiculous pwoposal!" gasped Paula, amidst great laughter. "I should be dead before I got there, yes, wather!"

The gipsy offered to deliver it, but Betty wisely declined. Like her chums, the captain had complete faith in the young woman's honesty and the honesty of her people. But Betty realised that Miss Somerfield might rightly object to too much encouragement being shown.

So the chair became something for the happy batch, with their bicycles, to take along somehow.

In pairs they took turns at portering it for awhile. Then it was decided that the pace must be made brisker than this. A roguish proposal by Polly that Paula and Naomer should be left to bring the chair along as best they could, the others riding ahead, was negatived.

Finally, Judy jammed the chair on to her own bicycle somehow, and offered to wheel it the rest of the way like that to the school.

But it seemed such a grand purchase, some of the more skittish ones felt that they must remain as an escort.

Sure enough its ultimate entry upon Morcove ground caused great excitement, coupled with merriment. Just inside the gateway it was unloaded from the bicycle and made to serve as a kind of litter, upon which Paula Creel could be borne up the drive, a crowd cheering her as if she were a queen of ancient days.

There was, however, little pride for Paula in all this, and still less comfort. Progress was of a halting, jerky nature, with sundry scrimmages to decide who should form the bearer party for the next stage.

Twice she was nearly tipped out of the chair; a dozen times she had to be forcibly restrained from floundering out of it in a save-me-from-my-friends way.

Finally, she really was tipped out, close to the porch, and the wicker chair clapped over her with great hilarity.

Louder and louder the teasers laughed and cheered, whilst Paula, like a cooped chicken, squaked and cackled most distressfully.

Meantime, Betty had slipped away to take at least some of the things for Madge, to leave them just inside the san entrance. The captain had no intention of trying to go up to the ward again. The dumped packages, with a scribbled message on a page torn from a pocket-book, would be found by nurse and taken up to her patient.

Betty had set down the gifts on a bottom step, and was pencilling the message to be left with them when she heard voices from overhead. Nurse appeared to be in talk with visitors at the ward doorway just as they were leaving.

After writing another word or two hurriedly, Betty paused, to pay closer heed to the voices.

Mrs. Merrow and Ivy!

Next moment the descending step of one of the visitors—but only one—clacked on the stonework.

Betty scribbled the last few words in the note, signed it, and clapped the scrap of paper upon the little mound of parcels.

Then, straightening up, she saw Ivy Merrow coming alone down this bottom flight of steps. And the wretchedness in Ivy's face gave Betty a great shock.

Now, when Ivy had seen and recognised the girl towards whom she was descending, she had nothing to say in greeting. Not the heart for a mere "Good-morning" even!

"Ivy," broke for Betty, after a moment or two during which her tongue had refused to function. "How—how good of you to have come over again."

"You think so?" Ivy returned drearily. "Auntie's doing; not mine. I— She would make me come with her," was the hard-driven utterance. "And now I've seen Madge again, heard them talking—auntie and the nurse—about that arm—"

"But, Ivy, it will get quite all right again."

"Will it?"

It was the moment for Betty to realise that this girl seemed to be in greater misery about the injury than Madge had been, or was ever likely to be.

"What have you heard then, from nurse?" Betty asked, with a leaping heart. "Is there something that is being kept from us? Oh, Ivy, if there is, tell me—tell me! I'll promise not to tell anyone else, if you like. But—"

"No, I shan't say," Ivy refused, with a shake of the head as miserable as her tone of voice. "And we had better not say any more, Betty; I don't feel I can talk!"

"Very well. Only—may I say one thing? I'm afraid, Ivy, you're thinking that if you had not been driving that car, yesterday morning, the accident would never have happened. But you mustn't—"

"Oh, don't give me your advice!" was the irritable interruption. "You mustn't! What's the good of talking like that, when I feel I—I—"

The anguished voice trailed off into silence. Betty, abashed, felt that she ought to hurry away. She really had presumed, she supposed, in offering such counsel to a girl so much older than herself—old enough to hold a driving licence.

And yet, spoken in kindness, surely the remarks might have been better received.

"Not a wink of sleep last night," she sighed. "Look here Betty; in case auntie is persuaded to stay to lunch with Miss Somerfield. It will mean my staying on too. But I—I don't want to have all your chums around me."

"I understand, Ivy. We won't pester you. So, good-bye once again," Betty faltered, turning to pass out whilst Ivy, doubtless, would wait there for her aunt to come down. "But you will let me leave this with you, Ivy?"

"Leave what?"

"The assurance that not one of us holds you to blame for the accident. You were not driving too fast—Madge has said so. You were not talking at the wheel, either—not being inattentive."

"Good-bye," Ivy said, without looking at Betty.

And so they parted. The gong had whanged its summons to the dinner-tables, and Betty did not find her chums again until, reaching the Form table last of all, she dropped into her usual place—between Polly and Paula.

"Ivy's here, with her aunt, girls—"

"She is!"

"Yes," Betty continued, taking her table-napkin out of its numbered ring. "I'm afraid Ivy is really blaming herself for what happened to Madge."

"Why?" Polly asked, incredulously.

"Can't say, I'm sure!"

But Ivy herself could have said, only she had to be guiltily silent. And Madge—even she could have ventured an opinion; perhaps, only silence in her case was dictated by the desire to forgive!

#### CHAPTER 4.

##### Night and Morning

SOUNDS, late in the night, loud enough to awaken two or three girls in the Form dormitory who were only sleeping lightly.

Unusual sounds, causing the awakened girls to remain in a startled state, breathing quickly in the darkness!

"You awake, Betty?"

"Oh, yes, Polly," the captain tensely answered that eager whisper. "Did you hear then—just now?"

"It woke me up."

"Me too." This, in just as deep a whisper, came from Pam.

"What's happening then?" Polly impatiently wondered. "Something to do with Madge?"

"I should think—it must be," Betty responded,



The gipsy included all three Morcove girls in a strange stare. "'Tis all I can say; 'tis the best," she muttered. "Great gain, great loss to each of you . . ."

with a sinking heart. "First I heard an extension telephone-bell somewhere in the house. Then somebody went downstairs."

"It was Miss Somerfield, I fancy—rung up in her bed-room. Nurse could ring across, you know, from the san," Pam said under her breath.

"Oh dear," Polly grieved. "Then Madge is worse!"

"Hark! That's somebody else going down now," Betty breathed.

Next second she flung aside her bed-clothes and came foot-to-floor.

"I can't stand this, girls. I shall go down. If it has to do with Madge—we want to know!"

"Pam and I come with you—?"

"No, Polly," Pam interposed, before the captain could answer. "Let Betty go alone. They don't want a crowd—and that's what it will end in, unless we're careful."

"Listen!"  
Polly, sitting up in bed, raised a finger excitedly.

"Now somebody has gone out of doors. Going across to the san. You can tell by the sound of those footsteps."

Betty, whilst flinging on a dressing-gown, darted to one of the open windows of the dormitory.

In an instant she had Pam and Polly on either side of her there at the window. Those three girls had made all their movements in complete silence, and no other scholars had yet been disturbed.

That handsome, isolated building which was the school's "san," loomed picturesquely before the watchers' eyes, in darkness only relieved by starlight.

"There goes whoever-it-is," whispered Polly, discerning a shadowy figure hastening towards the building's Gothic porch.

"Miss Somerfield," Betty hazarded, softly. "Then it is something about Madge—some sudden turn for the worse!"

"Poor darling Madge," said Pam. "What a cruel shame."

Peering hard they were able to see Miss Somerfield—as they felt sure it must be—let herself in at the porch-door.

Then, directly below their dormitory windows, light streamed out on to the gravel in front of the schoolhouse-porch, so that they could tell; the front door had been opened, to let somebody pass either in or out.

A moment more, and some other footsteps were audible, taking somebody rapidly in the direction of the garages and the chauffeur's private quarters.

"A car to go to Barncombe for help—a doctor," Polly breathlessly inferred. "Oh, this is awful!"

"Sh!" Pam entreated. "Don't let's wake up the other girls."

"I'm off to find out," Betty whispered, tip-toeing away. "I'll be as quick as I can. You two had better not come perhaps."

She vanished, and for a full minute after that Pam and Polly stood in a rapt, an almost stricken state.

Their Madge! Oh, their greatly loved chum, how was it with her now?

Presently, Pam stole towards her bed and found her dressing-gown. She put it on, and thrust her feet into bedroom slippers. It was like her to be before Polly in doing this. Polly was all ill-suppressed agitation; Pam, quite calm now.

Then, whilst they stood about, awaiting Betty's

return, they heard a car go quietly away from the school.

They returned to the window and could see; when the car had passed out on to the Barncombe road, it instantly gathered speed.

Its headlights casting great wavering fans of light before it, the car fairly roared away in the direction of the town.

"Urgent!" Polly commented, and chafed her hands together.

At last, Betty came creeping back.

"I had to wait for Miss Courtway to come in again. It was she who went round to knock up the chauffeur and get him to go for the doctor and also let Madge's father know. She is in great pain. The hand, greatly swollen, and a lump at the armpit has started."

"She grazed the hand badly," Pam recollected. "Blood poisoning?"

Polly took a wild turn about the dark room, between rows of beds that held schoolmates sleeping on in happy ignorance of this sudden terrible development. For terrible it was, as these three realised.

"Yet, as Miss Courtway said," Betty whispered, "they have been so careful—on guard against anything like that. She ordered me back to bed; but really she was awfully decent."

"There's a light in the ward that we could see Madge by, even from here," Polly fumed, after drifting back to the window. "If only the curtains at the windows were not drawn. In great pain, you say . . ."

"And, girls, what do you think Miss Courtway told me just now?" Betty whispered on. "There was a letter during the day from the B.B.C. One of the officials wrote so nicely to Miss Somerfield asking if Madge could play for them. He didn't know about the accident. He had only heard that Madge made such a hit as a schoolgirl player at the Swanlake garden-party."

Polly was lip-between-teeth for a moment. Then:

"Fancy! And the invitation will have to be declined! Madge might have won more fame for herself, might have brought greater credit than ever upon Morcoove at the same time. But she can't—she can't do it now."

"Some day—?"  
"Some day?" Polly echoed Pam's brief murmur despairingly. "If she doesn't die instead. Oh, I can't bear it! We're not going to bed again, are we? I can't tell you!"

But Betty and Pam, between them, were able to overcome this half-frantic dread that was Polly's. They did not think less of her for failing to face-up to the appalling situation with anything like their composure. They knew how she was constituted, how her whole nature was opposed to helpless waiting.

From thinking how well she understood Polly, Betty fell to thinking, as she lay in bed once more, how well she knew all her chums. And this left her thinking of Madge's fine character in particular.

Devoted to her music for music's sake, without a thought of future fame. Yet as early as this fame had actually come to her. And now she was laid low, and it might be her fate never to have the proper use of that arm again. And would she make a moan of her shattered career? Not Madge!

The clock had struck two before Betty slept. She seemed to be awake again instantly; but it was bright morning now, and, significantly, Polly and Pam were also awake.



The three of them had been roused before all other girls by that which had become their special anxiety in regard to Madge. That increased anxiety due to happenings in the night—it had still troubled their minds, even whilst they slept.

Silently they arose and washed and dressed, then hastened downstairs. The rising-bell had not yet rung, and they scarce knew what to do with themselves.

There was nobody about of whom they could obtain information about the sufferer. One of the maids said that Miss Somerfield was over at the san—was believed to have spent most of the night there.

"We can't go bothering them over there at this hour," Betty ruled. "Shall we go for a half-hour's walk?"

"Best thing we can do," Polly eagerly agreed. "When there is simply nothing we can do for Madge."

Pam also was more than ready to take a good turn out of doors. They set off, going down to the main gates at a brisk pace. The morning sunshine, the salt wind coming in from the ocean, their own lively stepping along—it all combined to banish the worst of that gloom which had descended upon them in the night.



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After going only a little way along the main road, they turned aside into that road which wound away over the great moor.

Without realising, perhaps, on this moorland road they were now making for the scene of that mtoring accident by which Madge had suffered so tragically.

"The gipsies—they are still here," Pam remarked, nodding towards some tenting and the yellow van.

The tiny encampment was set amongst a dense area of golden gorse, a good step from the roadway. The girls could not see if any of the gipsy folk were about; but the smoke from a fire in the open drifted in the wind as if fresh fuel had recently been added.

"I wonder how many they are?" Betty mused aloud. "I say, though, do we want to go any farther? The school will be down by the time we get back."

"No," Pam said promptly. "We shall only come to where the accident occurred."

"I'd like never to see that spot again," Polly frowned. "I shall always think of Madge when I pass it. Hallo, here's that gipsy-girl who sold us the chair yesterday!"

She had suddenly appeared, stepping lithely clear of gorse and bracken, through which she had picked her way, bearing an old iron kettle. Questing water, evidently.

Her black hair, with the purplish reflection of a raven's wing, was bound about with a brightly coloured scarf. Big gold earrings shimmered in the sunshine. In all respects, she represented that picturesqueness which gipsies as a tribe still retain. She smiled, giving a kind of curtsey.

"Nice morning, young ladies! Can I tell your fortunes for you now? Eh, missies, do 'ee now let Gipsy Beth tell your fortunes! I'll ask no silver for it, young ladies—no, I won't!"

All three girls smiled; but Polly, after smiling, mumbled heavily.

"I wish she could tell us, if it would be all right with Madge in the end."

"Are you a true fortune-teller?" Pam asked, still smiling. "I think I've a sixpence—yes."

"But I won't take it, young lady; not from you."

"Then you won't tell my fortune," Pam smiled serenely. She was trying to provide an amusing diversion from the oppressive anxiety. "Here we are; a couple of shillings," she remarked, having taken those coins from her pocket. "I'll pay for all, girls. Now, Gipsy Beth, just for fun!"

"Ah, but you're good 'uns, all on you, as I said yesterday!" the young gipsy exclaimed fervently. "I know! And what I say, young ladies, knowing so well, will be found to come true—ay! Can I tell fortunes? Give us your hand, then, young leddy, and I'll soon show you!"

"There, then!"

And Pam's dainty white hand was offered, being instantly inspected by the gipsy.

A few moments went by in complete silence. "Yes, well?" Pam laughed.

But Gipsy Beth suddenly let the hand go free. For an instant she showed a troubled look, then sparkled her teeth at Betty.

"I'll see if I can do better with you, my dear."

"Right-ho!" Betty laughed; but she felt uneasy about the silence in regard to Pam.

Again the gipsy, after consulting the offered hand, as if to read it, remained silent. She let it go at last, as she had let Pam's go, in a disappointed way.

"Goodness!" Polly exploded, advancing a step to offer her hand. "Mine, then! See if I'm any better!"

She was inferring that Gipsy Beth could not, according to the dictates of her own honest faith in the power to tell fortunes, predict anything very nice for Betty and Pam.

A third time silence, as Polly's hand was looked at. A third time the gipsy had to let a white hand fall from her own brown fingers, looking slightly distressed.

"But if there is anything in fortune-telling, and you really can do it," Betty cried with a forced smile, "you must be able to tell us something!"

The gipsy stooped to pick up the sooty kettle. Straightening up again, she took a few steps, then stopped, to include all three girls in a strange stare.

"Great gain, great loss," she said with visible agitation. "'Tis all I can say; 'tis the best. Great gain, great loss to each of you, young ladies. Think it strange; so do I. Great gain, great loss!"

Pam smiled serenely.  
"Yes, well, I suppose it's what everybody meets with at some time or other in life—great gain and great loss!"

"Hang the gain!" Polly exclaimed. "What about the loss? Gipsy Beth, does that mean the loss of someone dear to us?"

"I have said all I shall say," was the cryptic response with which the gipsy passed on.

#### CHAPTER 5.

##### Over the 'Phone

MUTE and still remained the three girls for a half-minute after Gipsy Beth had left them.

They exchanged glances, but they could not immediately exchange comments. It was the old, old story. A bit of fortune-telling, tried for the sake of an amusing diversion, had succeeded in leaving the "clients" greatly impressed.

At last Pam laughed.  
"Not worrying, are you?"  
"Oh, just as if!" Betty laughed in return. "Of course, there's nothing in it. Great gain, great loss." Anybody could safely predict that for anybody else!"

"Dash it all—yes!" Polly grimaced. "Oh, well, it was something to—pass the time! Only a bit odd, wasn't it—the same in each of our cases?"

"Yes, that was strange," Betty nodded.  
"And I believe, you know," Polly frowned on, "she meant the loss of someone dear to each of us. You could tell; she felt upset herself on our account."

"She was serious, that's certain. Usually they only tell you a lot of bunk about handsome husbands and ten thousand a year," Betty said, forcing another laugh. "But let's get back now."

At that instant a motor-horn sounded. There was a car speeding along the main road, going in the direction of the school.

"The doctor's car," Betty breathed, as she and her chums glimpsed it. "As early as this!"  
"After being fetched to the school in the night," muttered Pam.

Polly, keeping silent, looked worried again.  
All three of them hurried now to get back to the school. They were half-inclined to regret having come out for the early morning wander round. They would have agreed that this regret was due to a fancy that news concerning Madge might have been obtained ere this had they stayed in bounds.

But, subconsciously, some of that regret must have been attributable to the meeting with Gipsy Beth.

Back at the school gateway they sent their eyes

instantly in the direction of the san. The car that had flashed by on the road was now standing in front of the porch of that building.

A good many girls had come out for a "breather" on the games field; but the Study 12 three knew that nothing could be learned from them.

"I shall find Miss Courtney," was Betty's decision. "I know it is bothering her when one shouldn't; but she's a good sort—she'll make allowances."

"Oh, yes!" Pam nodded, whilst Polly gave an eager:

"You do that, Betty; I would!"  
So in a couple of minutes Betty was under Morcove's roof again.

The schoolhouse was in its usual early morning state of liveliness. Girls teemed everywhere. Somehow, their vitality and joyousness left Betty with a sense of confusion. She was accustomed to such animation—in the ordinary course took her full share in it. But now—

Between her and the normal activities and jollities of school life a great abyss seemed to have formed. She found herself, whilst questing the Form-mistress, going as one in a dream amongst many girls to whom this new day meant a bitterness that was merely tintured with concern for Madge.

They did not know! They knew nothing yet, that was evident, of what had occurred in the night.

Half-way along a first-floor passage the captain came to Miss Courtney's room.

"Yes, come in!"  
So she was there. Betty had not felt at all certain of finding her here.

"Why, Betty, you were down at an unearthly hour! Pam and Polly, too, I was told."

"We woke so early," was Betty's simple excuse. "I am wondering if you can give me this morning's news about Madge? I hate to bother you, Miss Courtney, but—"

"That's all right, Betty. I wish I could tell you something good; but I have not heard one way or the other yet. We shall hear something after the doctor has left. He is here again."

"You must have had a broken night," Betty murmured, noting the unwanted pallor of the temporary mistress' pretty face. "And Miss Somerfield—she stayed over there at the san. We girls must all try to do what we can."

"I will tell you what you can do, Betty," said the mistress very gently, for the Form captain had spoken with a sudden lump in her throat. "Not make too much noise out of doors during the day, any of you. When Madge is getting better, then it will do her good to hear you all at play. But for the present—"

The tremulous voice broke off there. Mistress and girl alike were finding this suspense, this sense of crisis, too great for even the biggest effort to keep emotion out of words and looks.

A life in the balance! A life hanging by a slender thread by now perhaps; and that life one they and the rest of the world of Morcove loved so dearly!

"We'll not use the games field to-day, Miss Courtney. In any case, who can feel in the mood for games when—"

Tr-r-ring! Tr-r-ring, ring, ring!  
"Oh!" Betty emitted, whilst the Form-mistress gave an excitable start.

It was her own extension telephone that had shrilly rung its summons. A house call, put through from the "san." That was what they both wondered with fast-beating hearts.



Miss Courtway laid aside the telephone. "Betty," she said tensely, "Ivy Merrow is—missing!"

"Don't go, Betty."

"Thanks!"

Miss Courtway had already taken up the receiver.

"Yes? Yes, speaking. What? Oh, very well, put her through to me then, certainly!"

The moment's pause enabled the listener in this room to remark to Betty, who had so thankfully remained:

"It is Mrs. Merrow, I'm told. She wanted Miss Somerfield, but as Miss Somerfield is over at the san, they are putting her through to me. Hallo, hallo! Oh, is that you, Mrs. Merrow? Good-morning!"

Betty lost all interest; and then she experienced a fresh concern as she saw a shocked look in Miss Courtway's face, due to something she had heard.

Presently a kind of agitation caused the Form-mistress to speak in a tone of mingled horror and incredulity.

"No, we haven't seen or heard anything over here this morning. Just a sec, Mrs. Merrow." And then to Betty: "You haven't seen Ivy Merrow this morning, Betty?"

"Ivy Merrow? Oh, no!"

Miss Courtway resumed her talk with Mrs. Merrow on the telephone.

"No, Mrs. Merrow, I'm sure I would have heard. But how terrible! Not the least doubt about it, I understand. Yes, I quite see—if she left that note. I am so sorry you have this anxiety. If we do hear anything, we'll let you know. Pardon? Oh, not so good, I'm afraid. Bit of a scare in the night about that arm. Septicæmia, they fear. The doctor is here now. Well, good-bye, Mrs. Merrow."

A rather shaky hand returned the receiver to its hook.

"Ivy Merrow—she is missing."

It could have been only a moment, but Betty felt she had stood dumbfounded, aghast, for a long while before she could gasp back at her Form-mistress:

"What!"

"They found her bed un-slept in an hour ago. She has gone away from her home, Betty. She took just a few things and some money of her own, and went off in the night."

"But — great goodness!

Why?"

"They can't imagine, Betty. She left a note just to say that she was going, and wish they please not try to find her. Of course, they will move heaven and earth to get her back."

"Gone?" Betty echoed astoundedly. "From that lovely home; from an uncle and aunt who were so fond of her. And did they think that we might know something over here?"

"They wondered whether

T-r-r-ring, ring, ring!

"Just a moment, Betty."

Once again she was a listener to one side of a telephone talk—very brief

this time.

"Yes, speaking. Oh, right! I'll come now."

The Form-mistress clapped down the receiver again.

"I'm wanted over at the san, Betty. So I must run."

Half-way out of the room she spoke back to Betty.

"If I am kept, you'll take charge. There's no time to make any other arrangement. I can rely on you, I'm sure."

And with that she was gone.

It was all over the school by breakfast-time. Ivy Merrow—missing from home!

If only because Ivy was the very person who had been driving Madge back to Morcove on Monday morning, when the car met with that accident, the news had created a tremendous sensation.

But there was not the chatter about all this that there would have been at the breakfast-tables under normal conditions.

Something else had leaked out, causing even so great a sensation as Ivy's disappearance to take second place in girls' minds.

Madge was worse. Madge was very, very ill now. That arm had "gone all wrong" in the night. Another doctor had been called in for a consultation. Mr. Minden was over there in the san, so was the headmistress. The Form mistress had returned to the schoolhouse for a minute to give an eye to things, and had then rushed back.

"I must be there, Betty. They say she asked for me."

"It's all right. We'll manage."

That was the Form captain, in the crisis. Perfectly calm, as she always was—in a crisis.

Quietly, at the regulation time, into the class-room trooped the Form, books out for work. No talking, no reluctance to settle down to the lesson which Betty gave out. She made it "maps," as very likely the Form mistress herself would have done knowing the impossibility of getting girls to give their minds to any difficult task.

A hush in the class-room during that first session of the morning's work. A hush on the games-field, when girls had gone out for "break."

A hush in the whole schoolhouse, at the midday dismissal; a reverent silence, as if a sound made here, a voice raised above a whisper, might be heard over there!

Any fresh news about missing Ivy Merrow? None! Any fresh news about Madge? Yes.

There were whisperings about a possible operation. Some of the girls, absolutely aghast, were asking: Did that mean—an amputation? A specialist had arrived from London. So it was as bad as that then!

Hush!

#### CHAPTER 6.

"Whoopee!"

"LOOK here, you chaps—"

"Well, what, Jack?"

"Why can't we pop along to Morcove and find out something? Dash it all, I suppose there's no harm in just inquiring?"

"They can't hang us for it, anyhow."

"Don't care if they do. Come on then, boys!"

There were four of them, now whisking their bicycles round, in the quaint old high street of Barncombe town, to set off for the run to Morcove.

Jack Linton—madcap Polly's only brother—had been the one to make the suggestion, rather moodily. Like Polly, Jack was a bad hand at marking time. He had to be doing something always.

Judy Cardew's brother Dave was another of the four boys who had ridden over from Grangemoor, at the close of afternoon school.

Dave was imperturbable; a fellow to show little emotion. His anxiety, about the girl lying so seriously ill at Morcove, gave an extra seriousness to his looks. But that seriousness was not alloyed with gloomy impatience which troubled Jack.

Then there was Jimmy Cherril—just plain Jimmy, a fellow of no account whatever, according to his own ideas, dictated by an "inferiority complex" of which he was blissfully unconscious, not being given to self-analysis.

Lastly—young Bloot; Bobby Bloot, the beefy one of the four, the cycle-saddle squeaking under him now, even as chairs were inclined to creak when accommodating his rotund figure. A stout fellow, this Bloot, in the literal, as well as the figurative sense of the phrase.

"We shan't hear anything fresh, I don't suppose," Jack muttered. "We had news as late as four o'clock at Grangemoor—"

"And pretty awful news, too," Jimmy murmured.

"Rotten! Vile!" Jack raged. "And I'm going to see Polly, anyhow, even if I can't be allowed to see Madge."

"Oh, they'd never let you into the ward, Jack—"

"I know that, don't I?" Jack was now jumping down Bobby's throat. "I don't want you to—"

Oh, hang! I don't want to be spoken to at all! I'm—I'm like this, and look here, if you chaps prefer to leave me—"

"No," said Dave, quietly. "Why should we?"

"All I know is," Jack gloomed, the others purring along with him on their machines, "I've been something to put up with this week. Ever since we first heard about Madge's accident. Well, I can't help it! Can I?"—looking as if he would dismount and cheerfully fight the first chum to say otherwise.

"Course you can't," said Jimmy heartily. "It's all right, Jack."

"I wish it were all right," was the tight-lipped rejoinder. "I bet Polly, too, has been giving some of the others a lively time. Boys, look here! What are we going to do—give 'em all a cheer up, eh? Polly and the rest of the girls—"

"That's the idea," Dave nodded. "Take their minds off it all, if we can."

"We might ask them about that missing girl, whether they've heard anything," Bobby puffed, grinding along laboriously.

"Who?" scowled Jack.

"That Merrow girl—"

"What?"

"I say, we might ask Betty and Co. if they have heard—"

"Oh, shut up," well-intentioned Bobby was curtly cut short by testy Jack. "Gosh, what I've suffered from YOU this week, Bob! As if the girls will want to talk about that! Pleasant subject to change to, that!"

"Well then," young Bloot persevered, "what about asking them to bike back with us to Barncombe, for a look-in at the Cre—"

"There's a thing to say! As if the girls want to be stood' lemonades or ices, when Madge Minden—Oh, scat!" Jack fairly roared, and sprinted ahead as if he must drop Bobby behind anyhow.

Then, suddenly, Jack's mood underwent a lightning, dramatic change. It was signalled by his pretending to fall off his braked-up machine in that acrobatic fashion reserved for really joyous moments. He had become joyful—as suddenly as all this. He shouted as if he were going "whoopee!"

"Boys. Hi, look—gosh! The girls! And just LOOK at them, boys! They wouldn't be waving like that, if—if—Hooray, rah, rah! Good news!"

So the wobbling machine was hastily righted, and he, with his chums pelting with him, simply raced to meet Betty and four or five of her best chums, coming along from their school on bicycles.

"Jaa—aa—ack!" was the light-hearted hail from his waving sister Polly. "Hooray, fancy you!"

"Bekas, gorjus!" came Naomer's shrill yell, as she pedalled up, her head low over the handlebars. "Bekas, grand celerbration, pipooray!"

A few moments, and the boys and girls were dismounted together, on the otherwise quiet road, just outside the town.

"Well, what's what, Polly? What about Madge?" panted Jack.

Polly was smiling. They were all looking greatly elated.

"Out of danger!"

Jack took off his school-cap. He sent it high into the air and caught it as it fell.

"Yes," Betty said, radiantly. "In the last hour or two—a change for the better. Oh, a tremendous change—"

"One that means everything," Pam chimed in.

"They seem to have got it under—the poison in the arm. She'll go on all right now."

"Chaps, do you hear this? But DO you hear this?" Jack demanded of his chums. "When only a couple of minutes since we were—" He struck up like a regimental band, giving a very effective imitation of brasses, drums, and all.

"A Company!" he roared, like a sergeant-major. "About turn!"

"So I should zink," cried Naomer. "Bekas, eef we can't go to ze Creamery now—"

Jack made a mouth-watering sound with his lips.

"Ices, boys! Lemonades, with chunks of ice tinkling! Pastries! Some of the famous cream buns, mes amis!"

"I met a gipsy," sparkled Polly, "who told my fortune. She said I would shortly meet a tall, dark boy—"

"Handsome?" Jack quickly supplemented.

"Rather ugly, she said," Polly dissented, sweetly. "But I was not to be afraid of him. He would take me to the Creamery—"

"He will! He will!" Jack said, gaily. "He hasn't a bean, but his old pal Dave will issue a

Funding Loan, repayable next term. Hou-p-la! Allez-go!"

And, after another acrobatic performance with his bicycle, he set himself at the head of the combined parties. He worked away at the trigger of his cycle-bell, and soon all the other bells were chiming 'oo.

"Well, Jimmy," Pam took notice of that youth, towards the end of the short run. "You've been anxious, too?"

"And it really is all right now?" he asked, his voice rasping from the excitement. "Quite out of danger."

"So we were assured. And then we went crazy. The whole school has gone mad, Jimmy. The girls came out. We felt we must—do something."

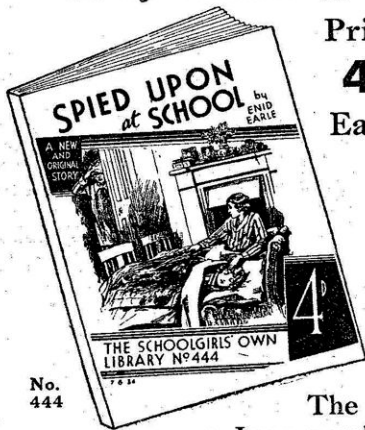
"There was a rumour, yesterday, at our school, that they might have to sacrifice Madge's arm, to save her life. Pam," Jimmy went on, huskily, "that seemed to me just too awful."

"I know, Jimmy. But we are not to think about it now. Mind you, Jimmy, she has got a lot to get over now. It has been an illness with her in the end; not just a fractured bone or two to deal with."

(Continued on the next page.)

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"It all came of her going to the Merrows' place for that week-end," Jimmy exclaimed. "That Merrow girl—I don't think she can be quite right in the head, really. She turned very funny, on the Saturday evening, when we were all there."

"Yes, well—"

This, from Pam, was quite enough to make Jimmy despise himself again.

"Sorry, Pam," he blurted out. "I should have remembered, you and your people know the Merrows well. Bracken Hill is close to Swan-lake."

"But I'm not disagreeing with you, Jimmy," came gently. "I think, myself, Ivy Merrow is a bit peculiar. It seems to me that a sort of hankering after fame, as a musician, just spoils her. But she is missing—must be going through an awful time, in hiding somewhere."

Pam paused. She and Jimmy, with the others, were about to dismount outside the Creamery.

"To say anything hard about Ivy now, Jimmy, seems like hitting her when she is down, that's all."

Total collapse of Jimmy! Crushing rebuke from Pam—so he felt it to be! Awful! Oh, why—why did he always hang round her, whenever he got the chance? "Clumsy ass!" he stigmatised himself. "When you didn't mean it nastily, about Ivy Merrow; but of course you had to say it as you did!"

"THERE we are!" Jack said, having juggled with two or three small round tables so that they became an odd-shaped one, with chairs complete. "And now, ladies and gentlemen, be seated, pray!"

"I hope," Polly sighed, "you are not going to try to be funny, Jack, just because all the anxiety is over about Madge!"

"One thing I am not going to do, and that is—sit next to you. Nunno! Paula, may I have the honour—but may I? Waitress," he addressed that amused-looking young lady, who was standing by for her orders, "a-glass of milk and a bun, please, for—let me see, how many?"

"Swendeil!" Naomer promptly protested. "Either cream-buns and ices, queek, or else Bobby and I will have a separate table, like zey do in ze rest-your-aunts!"

Pam, observing a vacant chair next to her own, looked about for somebody.

"Aren't you going to sit down, Jimmy?"

"Now what's the matter with Jimmy?" groaned Jack. "Sit down, man! What with one and another of you! Miss, I'm sorry," to the waitress; "but would you take the order from my horrible friend on the left there? The gentleman of stout build, yes! My nerves," he pleaded, and sat down to engage Paula in conversation.

"I knew," said Polly, "he'd get out of it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Ultimately the waitress and an assistant brought a seasonable array to this large party of girls and boys. By that time all tongues were going, and the Creamery must have rightly inferred that Morcove was itself again; so, too, Grangemoor.

Althouga young Bloot had not been allowed to do all the ordering, with the contingent liability of having to pay for everything—as playfully implied by Jack—he came out strong over the impromptu jollification.

Like Naomer, he was never exclusively concerned with his own appetite. A genial desire to see others also enjoying good things to eat was

always manifest, thus redeeming him from any charge of gluttony.

He was, he hinted, in funds, and if only the others would let him—but they wouldn't—he'd cheerfully pay for all. Anyhow, pity to send anything back!

Very little indeed was left to go back, when the time came for settling up. It was Naomer, with young Bloot to keep her company, who lingered to dispose of the only substantial relics of the "celleration."

"Zat is better," Naomer said with pride, as if he and she had really stayed to do some clearing up of a laudable kind. "And now, Bobby, don't you buy me anything at ze counters, bekas—"

"We might just look at them," said young Bloot, with that good humour of his. "I mayn't see you again until next Saturday"—as if that were a day a great way off.

So Naomer went out of the shop with him, five minutes later, looking half-scared at the tell-tale package which she dangled by its string.

"Bekas—enormous! I told him not to, but he would! So you needn't look like zat, Polly!"

"Remember," said the madcap, "the gipsy warning, kid! About a large youth; a guided youth, who would squander his riches—"

"All bunk," cried the dusky one. "Bekas, I haven't been having my fortune told. I don't believe in it, bekas—you never know!"

"What is all this about gipsies?" Dave asked his sister, during the wheeling of bicycles out of the bake-house yard.

"A few have turned up on the moor, Dave, quite close to the school. We can see the rough tents and a yellow van from our study windows. At night, we can see their camp fire going. They don't appear to be giving any trouble."

"Some of you have been having your fortunes told," he smiled.

"Betty and Polly and Pam—they were told something by one of the gipsies—a young woman," Judy gravely answered. "But they wouldn't say what. Dave, there can't be anything in it; can there—fortune-telling?"

"I'd leave it alone, Judy. There's a lot that has yet to be known about—the unknown. Some gipsies do seem to have a sort of gift; second sight, or whatever it is. Real gipsies, that is."

"Oh, these are the real sort, Dave. I think I've seen most of them. They are all women, and one is very old, stooping like a witch. The one called Gipsy Beth is quite a beauty."

"Boys!" Jack now voiced his rallying cry, "I'm going along to Morcove to have my fortune told! We can get that way back to Grangemoor, afterwards—across the moor."

"We'll be late."

"We'll be let off—anything," Dave was answered by the jovial one. "Our housemaster's wife, don't forget, was a Morcove mistress at one time. We've only got to say that we took in Morcove on the way back, to hear the very latest about Madge."

"Which you could have heard by staying around at your own school," Polly remarked. "They'll be ringing up to let Grangemoor know the latest, at dusk."

"Oh, rabbits!"

Jack, in fact, meant to go back via Morcove, for the sake of companioning Betty and Co. up to the last possible moment.

Nor were the other boys at all disinclined to chance it, about being in late. Nothing, now that Madge was out of danger, mattered a hang really! Moreover, wonders could be achieved

with the "bikes," presently, the grand news having done so much to create bounding spirits.

As for Betty and Co., they considerably made it a quick run for their school, so as to leave the boys with a little more time in hand, at parting. In the lovely summer's evening they all whizzed along, with the wind behind them, and soon Polly was able to sing out to her brother:

"There's your gipsy-camp, Jack, if you want your fortune told!"

"Can't afford it," he now stated, surprising some of his hearers. They never had believed that he was going to seek out Gipsy Beth.

"We'll go right to the school with you, girls, and wait by the gates, whilst you run and get us the latest about Madge."

"You boys had far better come in and report to Miss Courtway," Betty suggested. "She might be going to ring up Grangemoor, and so she could just mention that you are here—"

"And zen perhaps you can stay on to supper!" was Naomer's jubilant cry, when Polly came out with a surprised:

"Hallo, that's queer!"

"What is, Polly?"

"At the school boundary hedge, over there—between the games field and the moorland," she said, staring in that direction so that her bicycle wobbled rather perilously.

"D'you see?"

"Why, so there is!" Betty exclaimed. "Somebody sneaking about on this side of the hedge."

"A woman," said Judy. "A young woman—"

"A gipsy!" said Helen, more exactly.

In the last moment or so, all the cyclists had slowed, their attention being given to that figure which, so strangely, was lurking on the public side of the Morcove hedge. Now they dismounted.

Then suddenly the gipsy rushed away, to put herself out of sight—and they knew why. She had flown to cover, on the moorland, because she had sent a wary look towards the road, and had seen them watching her.

## CHAPTER 7. Denounced

BETTY spoke uneasily. "We must look into this. Here, hold my bike, one of you." She gave it into Helen's charge, and then ran

swiftly on to the open moorland. By her stooping as she ran, the others could guess that she wanted to gain concealment from the gorse, some of which was in low-growing patches.

Then Polly also darted away, and Pam followed. They went different ways with great swiftness. Like Betty, they wanted, if possible, to find out if that gipsy was the one they knew as Gipsy Beth. She was the only member of the encamped party that they had met, so far, and they had liked her.

Now, however, the suspicious incident of a few moments ago had created this unpleasant, not to say alarming, misgiving. The gipsy-like figure glimpsed just then had so, it looked as if they must revise their opinion of her.

Even if it were not Beth, but a gipsy of similar age belonging to the party that had encamped so close to the school, it would be almost as disquieting.

Gipsies were only tolerable so long as they were law-abiding. To see one plainly spying upon private property was to have a sudden fear of nefarious intentions.

Polly and Pam hunted about, separately, for much longer than they were aware, meeting with similar failure. They came upon each other at last, and a minute after that Betty blundered upon them.

"Hallo!" she laughed softly. "Have you two seen her?"

"No!"

"Neither have I; but I can tell you one thing," the Form captain added. "It wasn't our gipsy! I suddenly decided to go to the gipsy camp itself. Gipsy Beth was there. She was cooking some supper at the camp fire, and I'm positive she had been there all along."

"Honest?" Pam suggested.

"Oh, perfectly honest!"

"I'm so glad," Polly exclaimed. "Only, that was definitely a gipsy spying into the Morcove grounds, and surely she must belong to Beth's lot? Perhaps Beth is the only decent one amongst them? The others, rather given to picking up things by night, and all that!"

Betty nodded.

"I know! And it's a pity. Now we shall feel they are not to be trusted. I'm not sure that we ought not to let Miss Somerfield know about



"If you don't go from here soon arter day-break, then I must," the gipsy spoke passionately. "So jest you think it over—Ivy Merrow!"

She couldn't have been so cool and calm if she had just rushed back. Besides, the way she looked at me when I went close and spoke—"

"Honest?" Pam suggested.

"Oh, perfectly honest!"

"I'm so glad," Polly exclaimed. "Only, that was definitely a gipsy spying into the Morcove grounds, and surely she must belong to Beth's lot? Perhaps Beth is the only decent one amongst them? The others, rather given to picking up things by night, and all that!"

Betty nodded. "I know! And it's a pity. Now we shall feel they are not to be trusted. I'm not sure that we ought not to let Miss Somerfield know about

that spying. The dodging off—that was so suspicious.

But Betty decided, and her two chums agreed, that the incident need not be mentioned after all. It was the first of its kind, and, anyhow, Miss Somerfield had plenty to be concerned about, without that!

They waded through some bracken to get out on to the moorland road, as that offered the quickest means of reaching the high road, where they expected the others to be awaiting them. But now the four boys came riding towards them on the moorland road, homeward bound for Grangemoor.

"So you're off!" Polly blithely commented. "Couldn't hang about for you all night," was Jack's plea, delivered with brotherly crustiness. He and his chums had now, of course, dismounted. "Did you find out anything?"

"Only that it couldn't have been 'our' gipsy," Betty answered. "And that, to us, is a bit of a relief. It's horrid to find you have been taken in by anybody."

"You girls had better put your heads under the bedclothes to-night!" Jack jested. "Well, if any of you get stolen by the gippos—it's their favourite sport, you know; stealing little girls—we men will come and get you back."

"Right," said Polly. "You'll know me by a strawberry mark on my right wrist. I am going to paint one on it, to-night."

"My long-lost sister—saved, saved at last! So, cheerio, for it's getting late, and my bike has a slow puncture."

"Good-night, boys!" Betty said cheerily. "We must hurry, too!"

"Good-night, all!" Pam joined in. "Night, Jimmy!"

"Night, Pam!"  
Why Jimmy should need to look at her wistfully, like a devoted doggie who knows he has not deserved forgiveness, it might have been hard for Pam herself to understand. But she knew Jimmy so well by now. She conferred that special parting smile without which he could not go upon his way happily.

After that, a steady trot soon enabled the three girls to rejoin their waiting chums on the main road. In a re-united party Betty and Co. pedalled along to Morcove School, put their machines away, and then mingled with Formates, who were still in an overjoyed state about Madge.

But available information was very meagre. The Form was thirsting for details, and a comic rivalry set in to be "first with the news." Any girl who could show herself to be in possession of some special tit-bit of information, at bed-time, would enjoy great kudos!

Some desperate expedients were resorted to in this connection, and one was Betty's, when she slipped away to the kitchen regions of the great school-house, at dusk, hopeful of "pumping" members of the domestic staff.

She was in luck. Several of the maids were at supper, in the servants' hall, and one had been to and fro between the school-house and the san several times in the last hour or so. This was Ellen, the parlourmaid—always obliging. She was able to tell Betty a great deal, all of it highly gratifying.

"Though, mind you, miss, the poor dear does look terribly thin and gone off," Ellen confided. "I got a chance to see her, having to take something up to the ward for nurse. My goodness, at first I thinks to myself: 'Miss Madge? That

can't be Miss Madge—never!' You'd scarcely know her. But, there, can you wonder, miss? 'Twas touch and go with her!"

"I know it was, Ellen. But there has been no setback this evening, has there?"

"Oh, no, miss; you set your mind at rest about that! And from now onwards, nurse told me, 'twill be wonderful the progress Miss Madge will make."

Betty left good-hearted Ellen to help herself to cold apple-tart and cream, after cold meat and pickles. As girls were not supposed to trespass here, the Form captain slipped out by a kitchen doorway into the soft, warm dusk, meaning to work round to the front of the school-house and go in by the main door.

Then it was that, just outside the kitchen door, she came in for a big shock.

In the half-light of the kitchen yard she found herself suddenly face to face with a young woman—a gipsy!

It was not Gipsy Beth, but the attire was that of a gipsy, and the tanned face in the dusk looked so dark as to seem almost Oriental.

Hesitantly this intruder had been approaching the back door, bearing an empty pitcher, when Betty came hurrying out.

Perhaps Betty's stopping dead in such a startled way increased the young woman's nervousness. There was a long moment of dramatic stillness on the part of both. Then the gipsy faltered an inquiry:

"I—I wonder, missy, if they'd be so good as to give me a fill o' water in this?"—displaying the earthenware pitcher. "We be afeerd the water dipped from the gravel pit on th' moor be none too good."

"Oh, if that's all—take the pitcher to that yard tap just over there," Betty answered. "It's the same water as they draw at the sink indoors. But I—I don't know; perhaps you had better get proper permission."

She was wondering: was THIS the gipsy who had been spying through the hedge?

"Thank'ee, miss; if I have to come again, I will ask," the young woman murmured huskily.

"And—missy—"

"Well?"

"Excuse my asking, but there's been one o' you young gels lying very ill, hasn't there? Is she better, can you tell me? Us folk out there on th' moor have felt sorry about her."

"Much better, I'm glad to say," Betty answered, feeling more at ease now. "Going to get quite well, soon! And it was—nice of you—to ask after her. Look here, why don't you tap at the kitchen door there, and perhaps—"

"Oh, not to-night, missy, thank'ee. I—I don't hardly like to."

And the young woman, after Betty had left her, made use of the yard tap as quickly as possible, then hastened away.

Encountering no one, she passed out by a gate in the boundary wall of the kitchen garden on to the darkening moor. There was rough ground for her to tread then; but that should not have made a gipsy spill so much of the water from the heavy pitcher.

Again and again she slopped some of it to the grass, as an inexpert drawer of water might have done. By the time she got to the gipsy encampment the stars were out, and the wood fire burning near the bits of tenting and the old yellow van cast a ruddy, romantic light around.

Only Gipsy Beth was there in the open to mark



this other young woman's return. From the living-van came the voices of two women who were much older—one of them very old indeed, for hers was a mumble-mumble as from toothless gums.

Strangely, now, Gipsy Beth had a stern eye for the one who was setting down the pitcher of water.

"Been a long time gone for it, ha'n't you, when I told you where?" came the unfriendly comment. "And can't look me in the eyes, neither, now that you are back! Ay, well, I reckon I know why. We've had the police here."

The words seem to serve the one to whom they were addressed like the stab of cold steel. Beth first laughed in a bitter, scornful way, then strode closer. It was as if she meant to compel this other young woman to face her in the fitful light of the camp fire.

"Ay!" she murmured. "They were asking, were the police, if we knew aught about a grown girl that's missing from home. Ivy Merrow is the name."

The one who had fetched water from Morcove School made no answer. She would have edged away, but Beth said harshly:

"Bide a bit, you! They didn't ask me, did the police, so I've said nothing. But if mother chooses not to ask who you really are, my gel, that don't suit me, and so I tell you to your face. You, to come pitching tales to mother and old granny, and paying money to be treated as one of us! Mother couldn't ha' thought, when she agreed to it all. We're honest folk—leastways, allus have been up to now. And so, if there's not to be strife between me and my own mother—you'll end this, d'ye see?"

"Oh, but—but, please—"

"None o' that to me!" Beth said with passionate scorn. "I say to you, as I mean to say to mother, if this goes on any longer—we've allus been right with the police, and we are not going to get wrong with them now! They're some o' MY clothes mother found for you to wear! That about wanting to live amongst us, so as to be able to write books about gypsies—it were a lie!"

The fitful light from the camp fire played upon Beth's handsome face, sharpened by its look of fierce contempt. The same fitful light showed the other's downcast face and the utter misery in it.

"You can go and get a bit o' sleep now, if you like," Beth resumed. "But if you don't go from here soon arter daybreak, then I must. I can't give you away to the police. That 'ud mean trouble for mother. So jest you think it over—Ivy Merrow!"

Then Ivy Merrow, without a word to say for herself, drifted away to that tent which had been made over to her by Beth's mother. There, the time of the year being what it was, even this grown girl who had lived in the lap of luxury might have slept soundly enough.

But she would not even lie down to let sleep come upon her. Beth had so far relented as to concede a few hours' grace—until soon after daybreak.

Ivy, however, felt that she must go—at once. But whither—now? Home? No—oh, impossible! That which troubled her mind would torment her only a thousand times more—she could be sure of that, from dreadful experience—back there in the comfort and luxury of home.

"What am I to do, then?"

And, much later in the summer's night, she was

still asking herself, in wretchedness and desperation:

"What shall I—what can I do—now?"

## CHAPTER 8.

### Whilst Morcove Slept

**N**O sleep for conscience-stricken Ivy Merrow, this lovely summer's night; but for how many girls at Morcove School—what deep slumber!

It was, of course, the natural consequence of lost sleep during previous nights in the week, due to that terrible anxiety about Madge which was now happily ended.

But, amongst a few of the members of Madge's own Form, it had been secretly agreed, at bedtime, that the likelihood of others sleeping so soundly meant a fine chance for a "speer."

Fay and Edna Denver, and two or three girls who had lately come under the influence of that



**Y**OUR editor will appreciate a letter from you. His address is "THE SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN," The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. If you would like him to reply to you personally, enclose a stamped, addressed envelope.

reckless pair, were going to creep downstairs at the appointed time, to enjoy a little supper-party, finishing up with a cigarette or so.

They, representing that shallow element which must be found even in the best of schools, had been genuinely grieved about Madge. They had shared the general anxiety. But this night, if it had found them weary at all, had found them only weary of having to go on quietly.

"Just you wait till Madge is better!" Edna had said more than once to her sister Fay, during the crisis. "I'll do some kicking over the traces then, I will!"

And now, to-night, Madge was better; was known to be going on so well that those who had kept vigils at her bedside could sleep like logs themselves.

The midnight chimes clanged. The last stroke of the hour bell hummed off into the surrounding silence.

Then, from their beds in the Form dormitory, Fay and Edna arose. Pat Lawrence and Eva Merrick were each out of bed a moment or two later. Kathleen Murray should have been rising up, too; but she had fallen into heavy sleep that rendered her heedless of a rousing shake. So she was left to sleep on.

All a-grin at their daring and the fun they were going to get, these four silently put on dressing-gowns and thrust their feet into bedroom slippers.

Not a word was exchanged until they had crept out of the dormitory. Even when the dormitory door had been noiselessly closed behind them, there was only some repressed tittering during the advance to the stairs.

Fay produced a plated pocket-torch and switched it on. For a joke, she flashed its dazzling beam in the faces of her fellow-miscreants.

"Who goes there!" she whispered hollowly. "Shut up, Fay!" giggled Edna. "Don't rot about with the torch. Now I can't see. If I sprawl downstairs—"

"Dis-graceful!" Fay breathed, mimicking the voice of scandalised Authority. "How dare you girls behave like this!"

She took the lead downstairs, thumbing on the light at this moment and that. Apparently, it astonished her followers when, instead of turning into the corridor of studies, she made as if to go still further downstairs. There came a whispered protest from Edna:

"Here, where are you going, Fay! Our study is the place?"

## HER PITIFUL PLIGHT

"WHAT can I do?" Well may Ivy Merrow, alone in her misery, ask herself the question. Unable to return home, banished now from the gipsy camp to which she fled in her panic, Ivy has nowhere to go, no one to turn to.

And all because of her one-time desire for fame! All because of her bitter jealousy of Madge Minden!

Meantime, Morcove is in the dark about Ivy Merrow. All Betty and Co. know is that she has vanished from home. But now that their anxiety for Madge has been set at rest the chums of Study 12 are able to turn their attention to



By MARJORIE STANTON

This fine story appears complete in next Tuesday's number of THE SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN. It is packed with excitement and humour and brings to a sensational climax the mystery surrounding Ivy Merrow.

"No. I've been thinking," the elder sister turned round to whisper; we'll make it the kitchen, girls."

"The what!" "Kitchen," Fay repeated silkily. "It'll be heaps more fun for us, and far safer, too. I'm not so sure about you girls not leaving fag-ends about!"

"But you're just crazy, Fay," her sister gasped. "For us to take things down from our studies to the kitchen is simply heading for trouble. We're bound to leave something—"

"We're not going to take anything downstairs," Fay softly struck in. "Why should we, when there's the school larder!"

Pat laughed very quietly. "Well, that is, Fay! But go on, then."

"Splendid idea, I think," tittered Eva Merrick. "For it suddenly occurs to me; if any discovery is made in the morning, the whole thing may easily be put down to those gipsies."

"Ah, yes; they're awful thieves, aren't they?" Edna remarked. "We might even leave a kitchen window open."

It was Fay's turn to laugh softly. "As I had already thought of doing that, we very possibly shall!"

Better luck than they deserved was enjoyed by the four. Quite a leisurely midnight repast was indulged in, at the expense of the school's extensive larder. Lemon-squash, greatly improved by cubes of ice from the electric refrigerator, became a drink to linger over, to the accompaniment of choice Virginians.

Once or twice Edna went back to the foot of the stairs to listen; but this was done simply to make believe that risk existed—that risk with which the sisters liked to spice their pleasures.

There was never any actual fear of being taken by surprise, and towards the end some of the funny remarks with which they amused one another were offered in less guarded voices, and laughter, now and then, became immoderate.

About one in the morning Pat and Eva were for a return to bed, but Fay was exceedingly comfortable in the best easy chair that the kitchen quarters had offered. It was one reserved by day for cook, whose proportions were ample. So spidery Fay, wearing only pyjamas under a silk dressing-gown, could be very much at ease, lolling there.

She would not get up yet, but would have another cigarette. Besides, she had another story to tell Pat and Eva, about her and Edna's other school.

"The one we were at, you know, until it was decided that our presence was 'Noo Loonger Required!'"

At last, however, the final cigarette was stubbed out, and then Fay decided which of the kitchen windows had better be left open—"if only to let out the smoke!"

She chanced to break the glass whilst doing this, but as this fracture came about quite noiselessly, it didn't matter. Indeed, as they all agreed, the broken pane would help to throw suspicion on a midnight intruder on outside.

"And as there are more fag-ends lying about on the floor than I care to pick up," Edna tittered, "just as well if they do blame it on to the gipsies!"

"Why, of course—yes. Gipsies smoke, don't they?" Eva grinned.

"A bad habit," Fay remarked, with fine disdain. "But then—they are only gipsies!"