

4 WONDERFUL STORIES WITHIN

The SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN 2d

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Week ending
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EVERY TUESDAY.



Silently the Rebels
Stole Away — To
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The 'No Surrender' Schoolgirls



*A Long Complete Story of Morcove School
Brilliantly Told
BY MARJORIE STANTON*

THE cry of the Morcove strikers is still "No Surrender!" They are as determined as ever to hold out until Miss Kitten is suspended. And, although the strikers do not know it, the likelihood of that is not so very remote; for Miss Kitten's deceit is at last in danger of being discovered.

CHAPTER I. "Blacklegs" Both

"EIGHT o'clock, Edna—and we are not in yet!"

"But who cares, Fay?"

"I'm sure I don't!"

"Well—neither do I!"

And these two Morcove girls laughed together, riding their bicycles along the dark road which was their way back to the school.

"Miss Kitten can't say anything!"

"She'd better not!"

Laughing again, first one chimed her cycle-bell, to proclaim a jaunty mood, and then the other did the same.

"Bit of a bore, though—this ride home from Barncombe Junction," Fay Denver remarked. "What an out-of-the-way place Morcove is!"

"Awful! That's one reason why I hate it so," responded Edna Denver—for they were sisters, she being the younger by a year. "I like a town.

See how nice it was, down there in Exeter, this afternoon."

"We did have a jolly time, no mistake," nodded Fay. "And missing the train back that we should have caught made it worlds nicer. So kind of Miss Kitten to let us do the half-day trip!"

"Oh, awfully kind!" Edna agreed sarcastically. "Well! We're more than half-way to the school now, Fay. Look at all the lights of the Headland Hotel!"

They were shining upon the left-hand side of the lonely highway, giving a good impression, in the darkness of the night, of the hugeness of the hotel.

"Shall we look in there, for a rest?" jested Edna. "Pay a call on Betty Barton—as we are such chums of hers—he, he, he!"

This was making Fay grin.

"I tell you what we might do, Edna; take a peep at all the girls who are on strike in the gym, when we get to the school."

"If they're still there! Shouldn't wonder if the whole thing has collapsed whilst we have been away."

"Oh, I don't know, Edna; they seemed to be determined to stick it. It was just like a storm; the longer in coming, the longer to last! The girls did have to put up with a terrible lot before they rebelled."

"Pam made them put up with a lot," Edna sneered. "Now, of course, she is gaining credit, as captain, for having tried hard to avoid open revolt. Really, she was only showing off her authority—as usual."

"How you dislike Pam Willoughby, Edna!"

"Have I any reason for liking her? Have you, Fay?"

"Oh, no! Give me any other captain in place of Pam, I say—excepting Betty Barton. She's no use to us, we know!"

"Yet she'll be captain next term. She will be back in the school then."

"Oh, well—perhaps we shan't be back!" laughed Fay flippantly. "Anyhow, I'm not going to worry about next term! We're having a fine time, this term; good enough!"

And, carelessly striking another chime from her cycle-bell, she put on speed.

"We will get a peep at the rebels, Edna, just for fun!"

"Yes, let's!"

Now, the lights of Moreove School were ahead of them. Normally, there would have been only lighted windows of the vast schoolhouse to be seen; but to-night a detached building, standing rather close to a certain part of the school bounds, showed lights behind blinds that had been drawn down at its large windows.

That building was the gymnasium—the rebels' "stronghold," as it had become. And the fact that the lights were on convinced Fay and Edna; the rebels were still there!

Accordingly, after turning in at the main gateway, they forsook the gravelled drive and pedalled across part of the playing field, to dismount close to the gym.

Then they extinguished their cycle lights and were in total darkness, except for the very faint illumination coming from the gymnasium windows on this side of the building.

"We'll do as we did before," Fay whispered her sister; "lug that garden seat close in under one of the windows, so as to stand on it and peer in. Never mind that the blinds are down: You can generally manage to peep round the edge of a blind. Just hark to them—singing!"

"To keep their spirits up—pooh," sneered Edna. "I guess most of them are wishing they had never started the business, even though Miss Kitten did goad them so."

"There will be a row, no mistake, when the Head comes back."

"And she may not see any excuse for what they've done, after all!" Edna ill-naturedly rejoiced. "A mistress is a mistress, even though she is—a Miss Kitten!"

Fay laughed softly.

"Any rate, Edna, so far as Miss Somerfield knows, Miss Kitten really is—a qualified mistress. If you and I happen to know that she is only an impostor—that's our good luck. But come on!"

During the next minute or so, whilst the reckless pair were easily shifting the garden seat into the required position, some song or other that was being sung by the rebels came to an end.

It was followed instantly by a babel of voices such as one hears, perhaps, when passing a house in which a very jolly juvenile party is being held.

So, if the rebels had only been singing "to keep their spirits up," as spitefully suggested by Edna Denver, they appeared to have succeeded in doing so.

But it was for no such reason that all the girls who were behind the locked doors of the gymnasium had started their sing-song.

They had simply started a bit of a concert for the sake of passing the time pleasantly, as campers might, round the camp-fire, after nightfall.

The rebels had a good fire, too, as a centre for their happy gather-round. Fuel was in abundance—thanks to certain foraging expeditions carried out with complete success during the day.

Food and fuel; soap and candles, and all else to ensure comfort and a retained fitness amongst the rebels, they had in plenty now.

"So, come on, everybody!" shrilled that dusky imp, Naomer Nakara, amidst all the chatter and laughter. "Next anticakle on ze programme, plis!"

"After which— Go on, kid; say the rest," said madcap Polly Linton, alive as usual to Naomer's love of eating.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No!" Naomer confounded her mirthful chums. "Bekas, we had a jolly good tea—an enormous tea! Besides, we want to leave supper until a bit later on, so we can make him a grand, special do!"

"How's the fire now?" inquired Pam, and one of those nearest to the tall tortoise-stove promptly hooked off the top damper with the poker.

Girls who bent over to peep down into the furnace received a pleasant glow upon their bonny faces.

"Fine!"

"Put another lump, for luck!" Polly gaily proposed, and suited the action to the word. "And now, Biddy would like to give us 'Smiling Through!'"

"I'm sure I wouldn't!" dissented Biddy Loveland, blushing; but there was a general and joyous clamour:

"Yes, Biddy—yes! Come on, Biddy!"

"Oh, I can't!" Biddy denied.

It was her misfortune to be seized with shyness whenever mention was made of her undeniably fine voice.

"And I," cried Polly, at the top of her form as a madcap, this evening—"I will accompany, on a comb-and-paper!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The comb was available; Paula Creel, finicky as ever about her appearance, even though she was on strike, had just then fished out a pocket-comb and mirror, to deal with her hair.

"Thanks, Paula darling," said Polly calmly appropriating the comb.

"Bai Jove—"

"Ha, ha, ha! Go on, Polly! 'Smiling Through!'"

"Wait till I've tuned up," pleaded the madcap, wrapping a scrap of tissue paper round the comb.

"What ze diggings, I want to be in ze band, too!" Naomer now announced, at the top of her voice. "What can I play? Ooo, horray—gorjus! Bekas, ze kettle drum!"

It was a fire-bucket—doing duty as the strikers' saucepan—which Naomer snatched up, along with a poker. Her first attempt to beat a tattoo upon the bottom of the bucket was not exactly a success. All the same, the applause was tremendous.

Then Polly "tuned up" on her comb-and-

paper. She drew such weird hurtlings and trumpet-like blasts from this age-old form of "wind instrument," that other girls simply fell about in convulsions of laughter.

"Right," said Polly, quite gravely, satisfied that she had mastered all the technique. "Now, Biddy, stand out, and you others all join in! One, two—"

A sudden terrific rat-a-panning by Naomer caused Polly to pause, glaring at that dusky chum.

"What do you think you're doing, kid?"

"Beating ze drum, of course!"

"Take care I don't do some beating! You've

got to play that drum properly, or not at all! None of your fortissimo here; one of your allegretto-cum-spirito. What you want, kid, is a little diminuendo; a touch of pizzicato. And don't start before me!"

Up went the comb-and-paper to Polly's lips again, and she was about to start some cornet-like notes when one of the mirthful girls gave the arresting cry:

"Oh, but look—look!"

There, at a lower corner of one of the windows, where the lowered blind did not quite hide the glass, a face could be seen. And such a face it was, being Fay's, contorted into a derisive, provoking, expression.

"Booh!" was the rebels' scornful retort. "Blackleg, booh!"

"Cheek!" Polly muttered.

"Here, can't we give her something that will teach her not to call again? I know! Keep her in talk, some of you—even open the window at the bottom. And leave the rest to me!"

As the madcap looked very happily inspired, plenty of girls were ready to do their part, by engaging Fay in conversation.

There was a bench which could be placed in a moment under that window, and this was done, whilst one of the girls drew up the blind halfway.

Then four or five of them, standing on the bench, their shoulders level with the high sill, raised the bottom sash.

"Well?" scowled one of them, finding Edna just outside the window with Fay. "What do you want?"

"Bekas, too late to join ze strike now! You should have joined at ze start—not wait until you know we are winning!"

"Are you winning?" Fay demurred saucily.

"Join your strike—pooh!" sneered Edna. "We wouldn't be such idiots!"

"You mean, you wouldn't have the pluck!" cried Etta Hargrove.

"No, bekas—booh, blacklegs!"

"But thanks awfully for going on with the strike!" Fay smirked. "It is giving me and Edna such a lovely time!"

"And so are we having a lovely time—a gorjus time!" yelled Naomer, of all rebels the one most easily stung. "Bekas, plenty to eat, and plenty of coal, and coke, and candles, in case zey cut off ze light!"

"We've had a halfer down in Exeter!" Fay boasted. "Only just back! Saw a splendid film!"

"Yes, well," Pam commented icily, "you stand in high favour with Miss Kitten, don't you?"

"She lets us do just whatever we like," Edna bragged.

"Very nice," said Judy Cardew drily—"as long as it lasts."



"What do you think you're doing, Naomer?" Polly demanded. "Beating ze drum, of course," replied the dusky imp. "Take care I don't do some beating!" Polly warned. The Morcové strikers were successfully keeping up their spirits.

"Bekas, wait till Miss Kitten gets ze sack, and we get another mistress—a proper mistress!"

"When!" the sisters laughed, their chins only just level with the outer edge of the window-sill.

"Miss Kitten hasn't got the sack yet, anyhow—in spite of the Form captain's demand."

"No," Pam calmly answered this twitting. "That's why we're still on strike."

"Hurrah, yes!" cheered a dozen of the girls. "No surrender! Up, the Form—hoorah!"

Meantime, Polly had obtained such useful assistance from one or two of her co-rebels, she was now ready for action!

Out of sight of Fay and Edna, the madcap and her helpers had swiftly attached the fire-hose to the fire-hydrant. The latter had been in frequent use, during the strike, as a source of water supply,

the girls being able ~~see~~ to draw water to fill buckets by using only slight pressure.

But now Polly, before mounting the bench at the window, with the business-end of the fire-hose, gave grim instructions that full pressure was to be used.

Adroitly she took her place with other girls, on the bench, holding the nozzle low down, so that Fay and Edna, just outside the window, could not know what was coming.

What came, suddenly, was a pulsating rush of water, inflating the hose.

Instantly, Polly wielded the brass nozzle, pointing it out of the window.

She was not a second too soon. In the very instant that direction was given to the nozzle, a rod of water shot forth—*shee-ee-sh!*

Fay caught it first, full in the face—and she tumbled backwards with a spluttering yell. Then Edna received her douche.

Sheesh! Again the water sprayed off her face, and down she went also.

Polly, who never laughed so little as when she had made her chums shriek with merriment, said sweetly:

"You can turn off now, girls!"

And Fay and Edna, staggering away, were too breathless to be able to answer the mocking cry:

"Good-night, blacklegs! Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER 2.

Conscience Makes the Coward

"UGH, wretches!"

"That Polly—I could tear her eyes out!"

"Let her wait!" Fay followed her sister's hissing remark. "She shall suffer for this; so shall they all!"

"I'm drenched!" Edna raged, stamping on with Fay to the schoolhouse, leaving the bicycles to spend the night on the grass.

"It's abominable, the way they're carrying on!" Fay said, regardless of the fact that she and Edna had done far worse things only to-day. "Now whoever let's us in, will see us in this state!"

"Look here, then," exclaimed the younger sister, "let's make out that some of those girls set upon us—"

"Ah, and kept us prisoners a long while—yes!"

"So that's why we didn't get in sooner!"

Such an artful ruse, although it involved fibbing, greatly consoled both sisters for the latest humiliation at the hands of the rebels—the second to-day!

Arrived at the schoolhouse porch they made their presence known by a ring at the bell, and immediately the door was opened to them by—Miss Kitten.

"At last!" she commented on this belated return bleakly. "I have been waiting for you two girls!"

She did not add that a guilty sense of having allowed them to have their own fling had caused her to hang about in the front hall, this last half-hour, so as to be the one to answer a ring at the bell.

"But," she gasped next moment, "what have you both been—"

"Miss Kitten, it's a shame!" protested Fay in an injured-innocent tone. "We would have been in long ago, but those horrid girls over at the gym—"

"They set upon us!" chimed in Edna indignantly. "And wouldn't let us go!"

"When they did, it was only after they had treated us—like this!" Fay added, boldly showing off her sopped state. "So it's not our fault, Miss Kitten."

"Go upstairs at once and get dried and changed," the hard-faced mistress bade them curtly. "I can't go into it all, when you are in that drenched state. Say no more!"

Then Fay and Edna scurried away to get rid of their wet out-door things, afterwards running upstairs to see about getting changed altogether. They went first to the study which they shared, in a corridor of studies that to-night was in darkness.

All the boisterous life of the Form—it had transferred itself to the gym! Fay and Edna's was the only study that would be occupied this evening.

"Say no more," Fay laughingly echoed Miss Kitten's injunction. "That means nothing more to be said by her, either. Ha, ha, ha! Edna, we're in clover. Say, though, didn't Miss Kitten look awful? Worried!"

"Serve her right. She was a fool to go on bullying the girls until they could stand it no longer."

"As to that, Edna, I don't believe she could help herself—I really don't," Fay said with sullen gravity. "I believe that is simply her disposition—the fiend that's in her. She must HURT others. How else can you account for her starting canings?"

"I suppose there are people like that," Edna nodded.

"Oh, lots! But I doubt if Miss K. is simply worried at having gone too far with her bullying. After all, I dare say she is capable of making out a case for herself when Miss Somerfield comes back. It's the other business, Edna! The fear of being still up."

"And still I say—serve her right!"

"Oh, so do I," Fay agreed. "One thing is certain; she must have victimised someone else to have been able to obtain such a fine position in the school. Not to mention that she most certainly victimised Uncle Arthur by robbing his firm in the City, when she was there as a clerk. What a fraud she must be, altogether, Edna!"

"The sheer limit. But it's not up to us to give her away."

"Not likely, when it would be an end to our doing as we like—and a grand let-off for the strikers," Fay added.

Then she saw her sister holding up a checking finger, at the same time staring towards the closed door of the study.

After a moment, Edna glanced questioningly at Fay. "Someone listening?" the look meant.

To find out if it were so, the elder sister tiptoed to the study-door and whipped it wide open. No one!

"But there was, I'm certain," Edna whispered, coming to Fay's side in the doorway. "I heard her—Miss Kitten it must have been, of course. Who else would come creeping to this part of the schoolhouse?"

"Frying! Wanting to know what we say about her, between ourselves!" Fay scathingly inferred. "Well, she knows now; nothing exactly complimentary!"

"And once again—serve her right," muttered Edna with her most spiteful smile.

JUST in time Miss Kitten had flitted back to the stairs end of the corridor, and so round an angle of the wall.

She was greatly agitated. For a moment she

had to stand with a hand to her heart, and when she started her descent of the stairs the other hand shakily groped for a hold on the rail.

A fear-haunted, lonely figure she made, passing down to her own private room on a floor below.

The great schoolhouse, to-night, lacked the enlivening presence of all those girls who were on strike. But under this roof were all those who were not involved in the great "bar out"; colleagues of Miss Kitten's as well, with whom she might have been expected to seek companionship.

But no; even if a vague aversion from her had not come about amongst all who peopled this great and famous school, there would have been her own guilty conscience to decree isolation.

Her guilty conscience—giving her not a moment's rest in all her waking hours; keeping her ever in a state of dread, so that only a few minutes since she had crept to the closed door of the Denver sisters' study—to listen.

The guilty person's ever-present fear: "They are talking about me, whispering about ME!" And, sure enough, she had overheard them discussing her and all that they knew about her.

All that they knew—if they had been right-spirited enough to make it known to those who had supreme authority in the school! But the two girls who had nosed out her guilty past were not disposed to think of Morcove's welfare. They left their schoolmates to do that.

Quite clearly they had let her see that they meant to trade upon their knowledge—and therein lay safety for her in that direction.

So long as she could go on indulging them, for just so long would they hold their tongues. All the same, it was terrible to be going on from hour to hour like this.

And then there was the far, far greater dread of exposure coming about—whether those two girls chose to go on keeping silent or not.

Miss Kitten sat before the fire in her own room, thinking now of that sister who had been the major victim in the whole course of imposture.

Where, she wondered, was Hetty to-night? Arrested, a few hours since, at the Headland Hotel, on a charge of passing a banknote and being in possession of another note—all part of money lost and believed stolen—Hetty would have been in a police-cell, at this hour, only Mrs. Barton had gone bail for her.

So, somewhere in the town, Hetty Kitten had doubtless found some humble lodging to last her until Monday morning, when she was due to appear in the dock at the police court.

She had been silent—heroically silent when taxed with the serious offence—or the police would instantly have acquitted her of all blame.

Indeed, if Hetty had elected to speak out, to save herself, the police would have been at Morcove School, within an hour, to arrest her—Miss Kitten.

But Hetty's heroic silence, for the sake of shielding the actual culprit—could it be expected to endure when Monday morning had come and Hetty herself was in the dock?

Full well Miss Kitten knew the nobility of her sister's nature. Without that to rely upon, there could have been no robbing Hetty of her well-won credentials as a teacher, whilst she was laid aside by illness; no getting on with the imposture with impunity.

There had been the heartless conviction that Hetty, when she did recover and found out how she had been victimised, would stay her hand rather than strike back. And such a merciful reluctance to denounce one's own sister had,

rightly enough, been manifested. But now—with this charge hanging over her head—would Hetty be silent still? Would she?

That was the question which seemed to burn like fire in Miss Kitten's brain to-night, even as she seemed to see it burning, in letters of fire, amongst the glowing coals of the grate.

And as it was with her at the end of a day that had been packed with such fateful happenings, so it was with her on the morrow.

Others in the school might be wondering how the rebels were managing for themselves, still in the gymnasium; might be marvelling that Sunday seemed to be passing, with them, so quietly, marking a proper respect for the Sabbath. As for Miss Kitten—

She could hardly give her mind at all to them now. To-morrow, Monday! To-morrow morning her sister must surrender herself at the police court to take her stand in the dock.

The previous night had been such a sleepless one for the bogus mistress, during the Sunday afternoon she dozed in her room. Then, after an early tea, she set out for a walk.

It was a mere aimless stroll she intended, to try and walk off some of the depression that burdened her guilty mind; but the very trend of her thoughts made her steps trend towards Barncombe.

Then it was she suddenly encountered on the road, two persons whom she would have gone miles out of her way to avoid.

They emerged from a gorse-screened footpath on the moor so unexpectedly, to her it was almost as if they had been lying in wait for her as she came along the road. Mr. and Mrs. Mordaunt—and he the very City merchant whom she had robbed when she was a lady clerk in his office in London!

But she was wearing those horn-rimmed glasses that, altering the looks as glasses do; so greatly, had helped her escape recognition previously.

Forced to halt for a word or two with the husband and wife, she could only hope, desperately, that he would still see nothing to establish identification.

That he harboured no suspicion as yet, his genial greeting evidenced.

"Ah, Miss Kitten, how are you? And what's all this we've heard about a strike amongst your girls, at the school?"

"Oh, an absurd business," she answered, forcing a smile. "We are simply leaving them alone, to come to their senses. They have a captain who, I am sorry to say, has been preaching revolt. Miss Somerfield will deal with the whole affair on her return."

"Our two nieces—"
"Mrs. Mordaunt, Fay and Edna are splendid! They refused to join the strikers."

"Um!" said Mr. Mordaunt rather dubiously. "Well, of course, one doesn't like to hear of scholars taking the law into their own hands. But when I was a boy at school—"

"Girls are different, Arthur—or should be," said his wife. "And I am very glad that our two nieces have kept out of it all."

"Well, there," shrugged Mr. Mordaunt, who seemed to feel too "full of beans" after the moorland walk to take anything very seriously, "as the matter is sort of sub judice—oh, Miss Kitten? Ha, ha, ha! By the way, there is another matter that is sub judice! I dare say you have heard about that dance hostess, at the Headland?"

"Er—yes, I did hear—"
"Dreadful impostor she must be!" Mrs.

Mordaunt burst forth. "Obtained the position under a false name! And it appears that she must have come into possession of all the money that was in the theatre-bag which Mrs. Barton lost in the hotel, the other night. An honest person, finding it, would never have stuck to it—would she, Miss Kitten?"

"Oh, no," said the very person who had found that bag, and kept it—passing the money to a sister then at the point of destitution.

"And so the young woman is to appear before the Bench in the morning," Mr. Mordaunt remarked, lighting a cigarette. "I think I shall go along to the police court, just to see. By the way—funny thing! They say that her proper name was found embroidered on some of her handkerchiefs—"

"Only the initials, Arthur!"

"My dear, of course! What I meant by saying it's a funny thing—the initials have a K in them: Now I am half-wondering if she isn't that Miss Kitten—same name as yours, Miss Kitten, meaning no offence!—who robbed me at the office. No relation of yours, of course!"

"You see," purred Mrs. Mordaunt, "my husband never really took much notice of the young woman at the hotel—or he might have noticed something."

"But I shall see her in the dock to-morrow," Mr. Mordaunt jovially promised himself. "Then I shall know! Well, we must get along back to the hotel for tea!"

"Would you care to join us, Miss Kitten?"

"Oh, thanks so much, but I— No, thank you," was the false-sweet response. "I had an early tea at the school and have come out for a brisk walk."

"Bye, then!"

"Good-bye!"

GONE, the pair of them—thank goodness! No recognition, even then—oh, the mercy that it was!

A couple of hundred yards farther along the road did Miss Kitten walk before she lost the violent pounding of her heart and could breathe freely again. Even then, she felt so distraught, it seemed best to turn back to the school.

But she was for no more walking along the open road. Striking aside on to the verge of the moor, she began to pick her way between the patches of gorse.

In this fashion she had found a faint track at last, and was proceeding along it when suddenly she stood confronted with—Hetty!

CHAPTER 3.

Flight, Unless—

ONCE again Miss Kitten had the guilty sense of having been lain in wait for, by somebody ready to accuse her. Her own sister this time—Hetty herself!

No word of greeting was exchanged now that they were face to face like this on the lonely moor. Hetty, as soon as she had stepped from behind some bushes to make the confrontation, said quickly:

"If I had not met you, I intended calling at the school after dark."

"Why?" panted the guilty sister, with only a fierce look for the one who had suffered so greatly at her hands. "Why couldn't you go right away from the district? I provided you with money—ample money—"

"Money that was not yours to give!" Hetty

caught her up wildly. "If only I had known when you were putting me in funds like that! It was lost money that you should have restored!"

"Well, and if I didn't restore it—wasn't that for your sake?" blustered Morcové's bogus mistress. "You were in need—"

"I was, indeed! But I'd rather have died than handled such money, knowing it to be not yours to use. And now," Hetty spoke on in a broken-hearted voice, "some of that money has been traced to me. There were two banknotes, and they knew the numbers, and so they could be stopped. Yesterday I was arrested at the hotel—"

"You were a fool to get that job there as dance hostess—so close to the school!"

"I had to get the first job that was going. And I would never have let it make any difference to you—my being so close to Morcové. But this was another blow to me. If it hadn't been for the kindness of Mrs. Barton, at the hotel, I would not be out on bail now. To-morrow—"

"Yes, I know," Miss Kitten hissed impatiently. "But you are free at this moment. Why don't you take the chance, then, to—get away?"

"What! When that lady has gone bail for me? Oh, how can you imagine that I would ever be so mean, so unfair, as to betray the faith she has placed in me. She said to me that she knew I wouldn't fail to appear in court to-morrow—"

"Ah, you and your precious scruples," the other raged. "But since that is your choice—"

"It is my resolve, most certainly, to appear to meet the charge," Hetty struck in spiritedly. "But you must not think that I mean to go to prison."

Miss Kitten was struck back a step by the shock of the words. Her white face flinched.

"You mean, Hetty, you're going to tell the magistrate that I gave you the money? If you do, then everything else about me must come out!"

"Can that be helped—now? I have dealt with you as forbearingly as a sister should, I hope, but—"

"Oh, it has been six for yourself, if it has been half a dozen for me!" was the snapped interruption. "You didn't want it to be known that you had a sister who had done—what I have done."

"That is perfectly true," Hetty gently answered. "I did shrink from denouncing you, preferring to put up with any sort of a struggle for a living, rather than have it known that you had robbed me of papers—my qualifications, my testimonials—by which I had been sure of a happy career as a teacher. But in the last four-and-twenty hours I have realised it is no longer a matter between ourselves."

"Oh, isn't it? Don't talk humbug, Hetty! If you have made up your mind to think only of yourself—"

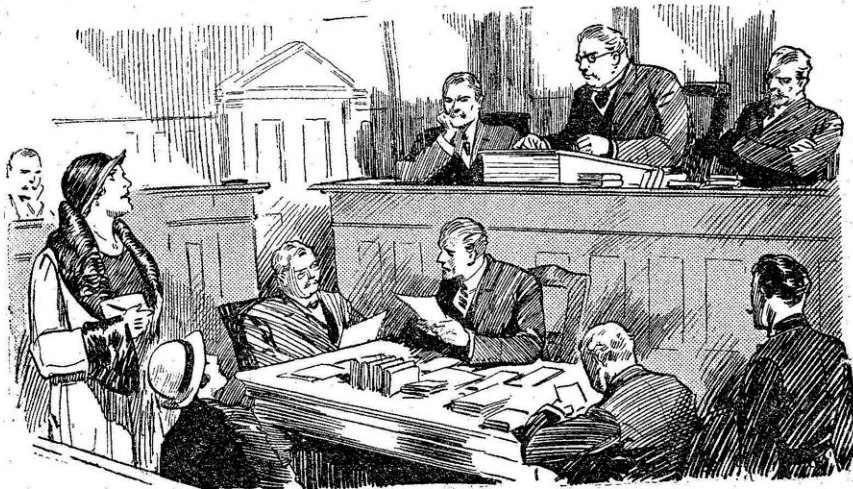
"I am not thinking only of myself. Now I am thinking a good deal about—Morcové."

Hetty spoke on, very steadily:

"It is not right that you should go on imposing upon the school. You have done it great harm. There is this strike amongst the girls of your Form—"

"That's nothing to do with you, Hetty!"

"Oh, but it is—everything now. At first, as you know, I was ready to leave you in possession of the teachership that you had obtained under false pretences. I was broken-hearted over the way you had served me—the trick you had played upon me whilst I was lying ill. But I thought that you might make good in the position, after all; and so I could not bring myself to denounce



While her mother was being questioned by the magistrate, Betty Barton was thinking of Joan Holland. Why had the girl failed to appear at the court? she asked herself dismayedly. Had she deliberately betrayed Mrs. Barton's kindness or—had something happened to her?

you to the headmistress. Since then, I have discovered what a cruel life you have led the girls—"

"It's a lie!" Miss Kitten stamped. "You've been listening to Betty Barton at the hotel, of course! She's like any of the rebels—ready to make up lying tales about me! But I shall have my version to give when Miss Somerfield returns!"

Hetty now looked her guilty sister steadily in the eyes.

"There must be no waiting, by you, for Miss Somerfield's return—"

"What do you mean? I say I can face any inquiry—"

"You must be gone from Morcove before to-morrow morning," Hetty struck in inflexibly. "I have thought and thought, and flight seems to me the only thing that will save you now. I can't save you, except by sacrificing—not myself only, but the welfare of that school."

"Oh, humbug again!"

"It isn't! You have just said, you reckon to be able to come out of any inquiry, absolved from blame. That means, you reckon to be able to go on being a mistress at the school. I cannot agree to that. It would be wrong of me. So," Hetty insisted firmly, "you must get away from the school at once—to-night. I'm sorry—"

"Sorry! As if you were doing anything very sisterly, after all—puh!"

"I'm giving you the chance to get right away before I speak out. Once before you managed to keep out of the way of the police—"

"Oh, shut up about that, Hetty!"

"I only mention it, as being something that helps me to hope you will be clever enough this time to avoid being arrested. I was determined to get a talk with you some time this evening;

and then, wandering about out here, I saw you taking a walk, and I hurried to meet you."

Miss Kitten's mouth was sagging at either corner. Sourly she exclaimed:

"I suppose it was to be expected that you would think of self! All right, give me away in the police court to-morrow, and have a sister who is in prison. Penal servitude it will be, of course—with that other business on top of all this at Morcove. I don't care!"

"But you must be dreading the consequences!" was Hetty's emotional murmur. "And you must do the best you can for yourself, whilst there is still time! Catch the night mail up to London; lose yourself up there— Well?" she broke off, for her sister was waiting to speak.

"Hetty, you can't give me away in the morning; how could you, Hetty!" came the miserable entreaty. "Anyway, I dare you to do it—there!"

"If you speak like that," Hetty said tensely, "if that is the mood you are in—then you know what I shall do? I shall not wait until to-morrow in the police court—no! And now I feel that I had better not, in any case. First thing in the morning, I shall call at the school and ask to see the acting headmistress."

"You had better not, Hetty!"

"But you will be gone by then, and surely—surely it will be better if I tell my story in private, instead of in open court?" argued the good-natured one. "Oh, don't you see, by that time you can be hundreds of miles away!"

"How will you know that I have fled the school overnight?" asked Miss Kitten darkly.

"I can easily be sure. Listen," Hetty went on in a tone charged with the passionate desire to do the best for her sister. "I will meet you again—out here on the moor, after dark to-night.

I can walk as far as the outskirts of the town with you, and you can tell me the plans you'll have made by then. At any rate, I shall know you have gone to Barncombe station to catch the night mail—"

"Very well," came dully from the bogus mistress, and she sighed wearily. "And yet—"

The talk did not end there; but that was the arrangement between them when, a few minutes later, they parted on the moor.

Another meeting, at an appointed spot at nine o'clock to-night! Miss Kitten would have pleaded a headache, and would be believed by her colleagues to have gone early to bed. But she would have crept out, instead, availing herself, after all, of the chance which a merciful sister had provided.

"Flight! It was to come to that in the end. And yet—"

Those two little words, recurring again and again in the mind of Miss Kitten, as she made her lonely way back to the school where her rule had wrought such ill!

So, somewhere in that crafty brain of hers, there must have been the thought: if only some alternative to flight could be found, she would snatch at it.

Possible escape from justice there was, perhaps, in flight. And yet—

And yet, how much greater the chance of ultimate safety, if only Hetty could be persuaded to suffer on in silence, after all!

CHAPTER 4.

The Flag Still Flies

"PHEASANTS!" cried madcap Polly Linton, round about ten o'clock on the Monday morning. "How do you cook pheasants?"

She had reason for asking. In Polly's grasp at this moment a fine brace of pheasants dangled in all their brilliant plumage, tail feathers tapering towards the gym floor.

They had been the standing joke of the rebels, since Pam Willoughby got back with them from her home at Swanlake, last Saturday evening, with a fine stock of more practicable "rations," and two bags of coal.

But because the pheasants had afforded some comic relief to the situation, that was no reason why they should not be duly cooked.

"First of all, one pwesumes," chuckled amiable Paula Creel, "you pluck the feathers off, what?"

"Job for you," Polly instantly decreed, to the great hilarity of other girls. "And you can keep the tail feathers, Paula, as trimming for a hat."

"Bai Jove—"

"Not to say, as a souvenir of the great strike!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Is this the right day for cooking them?" Helen Craig asked. "Have they hung long enough?"

"They should be just right," smiled Pam, who had the right Swanlake knowledge of game. "Quite ripe by now!"

Folly seized upon that word. It confirmed her own opinion of the pheasants, and she broke into song, parodying "Cherry Ripe!"

"Very ripe, very ripe!" sang Polly. "Ri-ripe is my cr-r-ry-igh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ah, bah, what ze diggings," shrilled dusky Naomer, "get on with ze job, Polly, eef you are going to be cook for ze day! Bekas my brekker has gone down already!"

"I am cook for the duration—make no mistake about that," Polly said. "Any complaints?"

"Yes, bekas I zink zere might have been more porridge at brekker! No second helpings—sweendie!"

"That," said the madcap, "isn't a complaint. It's a testimonial!"

"Yes, wather," chortled Paula. "The pwoof of the powridge is in the eating, what?"

"Dinner," the self-appointed head cook announced, importantly, "will be at one o'clock pronto!"

"Wha-a-at!" screeched Naomer in horror at the lateness of the hour named. "Zen I shall want a refresher in between! I shall be starvinkg by one!"

"Menu," Polly further announced. "Roast pheasant—"

Loud cheers!

"Boiled potatoes—"

"Hurrah-h-h!"

"Stewed prunes—and/or custard!"

"Hip, hip, hooray!"

"Biscuits and cheese—coffee—dessert—chocs!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That is," Polly grimly stipulated, "if I am left to carry on in peace! I shall want two cook's mates—"

"Me, Polly—me!" volunteers clamoured.

"Me!"

"Hi, me, Polly! Bekas—"

"You!" Polly withered the dusky imp. "Not on my life, kid! I'll have—let me see—Biddy and Helen! Oh, and Paula—"

"Bai Jove—er—"

"Just to do the dirty work!"

To observe elegant Paula's expression then was to go off into peals of laughter. In spite of being on strike like a loyal member of the Form, Paula still was most elegant.

This, coupled with the fact that she was not what you might call domesticated, made Polly's roguish choice of the beloved duffer a great joke.

"Refuse," said Polly, "and you will be expelled as a blackleg!"

"Quite all wight," Paula hastily beamed. "I wealise; all for a good cause—yes, wather! But don't cwozd, geals—owp!"

This was added as half a dozen girls showed their appreciation of Paula's volunteer-spirit by pounding her on the shoulders.

"That will DO, geals!" she protested. "Ouch! I say, do leave off!"

"No, bekas—bravo, ze duffer! Special medal when ze strike is over!"

"Or, at any rate," the madcap jested, "Paula shall be let off the caning that Miss Somerfield will order us all to have—at the hands of Miss Kitten."

The rebels laughed, then they booh'd. Sometimes a true word can be spoken, unwittingly, in jest. But the rebel Form had not the shadow of a doubt even that the headmistress, when she did return to the school, would see ample excuse for what they had done.

That she would deplore the revolt, went without saying. The girls themselves had deplored it. But Miss Somerfield's senses of fair play and justice, her knowledge of youthful humanity—all this guaranteed that she would know just where to place the blame.

"And if Miss Massingham had cared, she could have done something to end the whole business," Pam quietly remarked, debating it once more with Judy Cardew and one or two others, a few minutes later. "As it was, she simply refused to prevent Miss Kitten from tyrannising again, if we

went back into school. Miss Kitten was to be still in charge—

"And can't you imagine," Judy exclaimed, "how the tyranny would have been worse than ever. Naturally, feeling that she had come out top, she would have— Hallo, though—look there!"

The startled cry was due to Judy's having noticed a white envelope lying upon the floor, just behind the locked doors of the gymnasium. It must have been slipped under one of the doors only a moment since, or it would have attracted attention before this.

Pam and others rushed to where it lay, whilst other girls did some prompt mounting to the high windows of the building. Even as the captain picked up the note, cries were coming from some of the girls who looked out of window:

"It's Betty! She's going away again! Yes, there goes Betty, back to the boundary hedge!"

"After leaving this," Pam remarked, starting to open the note.

"What does she say, Pam?" clamoured her followers, mobbing around her; and so there was attentive silence as the captain read aloud:

"Headland Hotel, Morcove.

"Monday morning.

"Dear Pam and all of you,—Mother wants me to go to the police court in Barncombe to hear the case heard against that young woman. You know she had to surrender to her bail this morning.

"I shall just have time to get across to the gym with this to let you know. Don't think I am neglecting you all, when I might be helping. You are in my thoughts all the time. Hope to be with you later in the day.

"Mother is still very worried about that young lady who was arrested; and so am I. Can't believe she is guilty, and so it is a mystery why she could say nothing to clear herself.

"We haven't seen anything of her since she was released on bail.

"Best of luck, all! Morcove and fairplay for ever!

"BETTY."

SUCH was the hastily pencilled note from which Pam raised her eyes, to find all the girls who had gathered round to listen, looking very impressed.

"I'm awfully glad Betty is going to the court," was Pam's quiet comment. "From what she has told us, we can't help feeling sorry for that young lady."

"And Betty must be right when she says—there is a mystery in it all," Etta Hargrove rejoined gravely. "The accused young lady certainly had Mrs. Barton's lost money, and yet she refuses to say how she came to be in possession of it!"

"Shielding someone?" hazarded Judy.

"That's what it looks like," Polly nodded. "In which case she is doing a very unselfish, heroic thing."

"Yes, wather!"

"Bekas, what ze diggings, zey may send her to prison!"

"They will most certainly do that, on the evidence," Pam sadly predicted.

"Unless, perhaps, Mrs. Barton can get the sentence altered to a fine, and pay it out of her own pocket?" was Madge Minden's hopeful idea.

"If Mrs. Barton can do that, she will, we may be sure," Pam responded. "But the magistrates may not be inclined. At any rate, it is jolly good of Mrs. Barton to be going to the court."

"Girls!" one of the rebels interrupted, having remained on the look-out at one of the windows. "I can see Miss Kitten—"

"Oh! Is she coming to the gym?"

There was a rush by others, to see out of those windows which looked towards the schoolhouse. But the sudden excitement soon changed to merriment. Miss Kitten, without any Form to have in charge, in class this morning, was wandering about the grounds, without straying close to the rebels' "stronghold."

"Wonder how she feels this morning!" laughed one of the girls.

"I can tell you," said Polly gaily. "Not half as cheerful as WE feel, that's certain!"

"Bekas," yelled Naomer, knowing that a rousing cheer would be heard by Miss Kitten, "are we downhearted?"

"NO-O-O!"

And once again there was such a ringing cheer from the rebels as must have been heard, even by girls who were at lessons, as usual, in their class-rooms—under strict orders from Miss Massingham not to take any notice of the strike!

CHAPTER 5.

The Case of Joan Holland

BARNCOMBE'S police court was held in a large room of the old town hall.

This morning, with the clock at half-past eleven, that room was very crowded. More than the usual number of magistrates had attended, and there were a few extra reporters in those seats reserved for the Press.

As for the public—they had simply flocked in as soon as admittance was given by policemen stationed at the doors.

Trivial cases of riding without lights, and so on, were being rapidly disposed of now, and Betty's impression, as she sat with her mother in the body of the court, was that the Bench dealt very leniently with these offenders.

How it would be with the case of Miss Joan Holland was another matter altogether. The very presence of so many magistrates meant that her offence was looked upon as being in a very different category. They had attended in such numbers, simply on her account; and so had the Press. There was no other serious case to be dealt with.

Whilst the chairman administered a little homily to the last of the more or less unwitting offenders against the law, imposing a fine of half-a-crown, Betty cast anxious eyes around the crowded court once more—looking for Miss Holland.

She had been due for surrender to her bail at the opening of the court, but she was still not to be seen.

"Maybe they are keeping her back in another room, until they're ready for her case," Mrs. Barton whispered Betty. "To save her from being stared at too much, poor soul."

"Next!" said the chairman—one of Barncombe's most respected townsmen.

Instantly, whilst a grinning rider without lights stepped down from the dock to pay his half-crown and costs, the clerk of the court called loudly:

"Joan Holland!"

Dead silence followed. Then, as a rather excitable stir began, the bald-headed inspector or the local police stood up to speak.

"She isn't here, sir," he informed the chairman.

"What!"

"The defendant was released on bail, on Saturday, and was duly warned, your worship, to surrender at eleven this morning."

"She should be here!" frowned the chairman of the Bench, looking ruffled for the first time. "Is she outside, by any chance?"

"I am informed—no, sir!"

"Have her name called, officer," the clerk requested formally. "Joan Holland, on the charge of being in possession of certain moneys and passing a portion of them—to wit, one Bank of England note to the value of five pounds, well knowing the same to have been lost—"

"In other words, stealing by finding?" the chairman bent over to question the clerk.

"Yes, your worship!"

"Call upon Joan Holland to surrender to her bail!" the stern command was repeated.

Betty could feel her heart throbbing as she sat there, in the packed court, seeing a constable go outside to fulfil the law by crying the name. Mrs. Barton felt for Betty's hand and pressed it.

"Joan Holland!" the shout came back into the court, from some passage-way or other. Then from the open street:

"Joan Holland!"

Another silence; this time, it was an intense, dramatic stillness.

"Joan Holland!" was shouted a third time, outside the court.

After a minute's further wait, the constable came back.

"No answer, your worship. She is not there."

Betty exchanged an appalled look with her mother, then watched the magistrates as they communed amongst themselves.

"This defendant has not surrendered to her bail," the chairman of the Bench boomed at last. "A warrant must be issued for her arrest. Inspector, you had better let her description be broadcast."

"Yes, your worship!"

"And about the bail?" asked the clerk of the court, bobbing up. "Will your worship have that estreated?"

"Is the lady present who went bail for the young woman?"

"Yes, your worship. Er—Mrs. Barton, please!"

So Betty's mother stood up, very pale and agitated.

"I understand, Mrs. Barton, you were kind enough to go bail for this young woman who has since disappeared?" the chief magistrate prefaced. "You are the same—Mrs. Barton who lost the money with which the charge is concerned?"

"Yes, sir, and—"

"It seems to me you have been extremely good-natured," was the comment that drew agreeing murmurs from all over the court. "And now, you quite understand, I have power to estreat—that is forfeit—the twenty pounds which you offered as bail?"

"Oh, I don't mind forfeiting it, sir! If—if that can end the matter?"

The magistrates smiled grimly.

"We greatly mind this young woman's failure to surrender!" the chairman said with resumed gravity. "After her release on bail—did you keep an eye upon her?"

"Oh, no, sir! I couldn't bear the idea of doing that. I did help her to find a lodging in the town—"

"Ah! Then the landlady of that lodging must be called—"

"She's here, sir," voiced a constable, to whom a respectable-looking woman in the public seats

had just been whispering. "Wishing to make a statement."

"Let her go to the witness stand."

There the woman was sworn, and the clerk took her name. Emily Banks, No. 1, Tanner's Lane, Barncombe. Widow.

"Now, Emily Banks, just tell the magistrates—"

"Well, sir, if you please, on Saturday evening the lady over there"—meaning Mrs. Barton—"she came to my place with Miss Holland, to ask if I'd board her until this Monday morning, and she'd pay—"

"Who would pay?"

"Mrs. Barton, your worship!"

"What! More generosity! Well, well; go on!"

"So it was soon arranged, sir, and the young lady—for such she seemed to me, I must say, and not at all the sort to do anything wrong, least-ways stick to money that she had—"

"Mrs. Banks, if you will just stick to the material facts!" interrupted the clerk, fancying himself as a very important personage. "Thank you!"

"Then all I can say is, your worship, Miss Holland did sleep Saturday night at my house, and had breakfast on Sunday morning—though 'twas hardly a bite she had, being all upset, as I could see. She went out for a walk and came back for dinner, and was out again in the afternoon—I expecting her back to tea. But she never came in."

"When did she come in, Mrs. Banks?"

"She didn't come in again at all, sir!"

"What! The last you saw of her, then, would be—"

"About half-past two, sir, when she went out after dinner," having had a bit of a lie-down first, I fancy."

Mrs. Banks, by now, had succeeded in creating a sensation. Reporters were racing their fountains. On the evidence just tendered, Joan Holland had fled the district some time after half-past two yesterday afternoon!

The chairman coughed, intimating that he would like all the buzz of talk to cease.

"Silence, silence!" droned a policeman-usher. "Silence, there!"

"Very well, Mrs. Banks; you can stand down, thank you! Er—Mrs. Barton—h'm! The Bench have decided not to estreat your bail, in view of your having acted—as is clearly the case—out of pure compassion from first to last."

"Oh, I could hardly do less, sir—"

"A good many people in your position, Mrs. Barton, would have done a good deal less! I will only add that such great good-nature appears to have been utterly thrown away upon a most undeserving young woman. She will find that she has only made matters worse for herself, however, when she is rearrested—as she will be, without doubt, in the course of the day. There," the chairman said, starting to sign papers, "the matter must be left."

Betty, now that this was the sensational situation, was wanting to fly back to Morcové—to the gym! She knew that her rebel schoolmates had become keenly interested in the case of Joan Holland; on the other hand, Betty herself was reacting, as quickly as this, to anxiety about the strikers. For two good reasons, therefore, she felt this anxiety to rejoin them.

The public, with a noisy shuffling to its feet, went surging away from the police court, and Betty and her mother started to follow.

"I shall have to have a word with Mrs. Banks, Betty, my dear, as soon as we get outside."

"Yes, mumsie. I like the way she spoke up for Joan Holland."

Mrs. Barton was about to answer, when a hearty masculine voice interposed:

"Too bad on you, Mrs. Barton—eh?" She and Betty turned round, and were face to face with Mr. Arthur Mordaunt and his wife. "Now it begins to look as if that young woman were an utterly shameless adventuress," he added. "Shouldn't you wonder if she is the same young woman who absconded after robbing my firm in town. Her real name, you know, being something beginning with K!"

"Ah, Mr. Mordaunt," demurred Betty's mother, "it doesn't do to jump too much to conclusions."

Although the Mordaunts, like Betty and her mother, where residing at the Headland Hotel, no close acquaintanceship had come about. The City merchant and his wife were all right in their own way, but they were not homely enough for Mrs. Barton.

She soon finished the bit of talk with them, and then Betty was told she might have the car to run her back to Morecove. Mrs. Barton expected to be kept some time in the town, and she could easily return to the hotel by hiring another car.

Quickly as Betty made her departure from the police-court, she was painfully aware of police activities starting even then, in connection with vanished Joan Holland.

On the way out of the town, police were strongly in evidence, mostly riding bicycles or motor-cycles. The district was to be scoured as the result of that hue-and-ery which had now begun; that was what all this activity meant.

Alone in the car, Betty had many a sad and puzzling thought about the missing young woman, until the school came in sight. Then she reacted to that loving concern for her chums and other schoolmates, so strong within her ever since the strike began.

The car belonged to the hotel, and so, when they were level with the drive-in to the Headland, she got the driver to stop, to let her get out and walk the rest of the way to the school.

As before, she took to the verge of the moor, encountering no one during her zig-zag course between the patches of gorse and amongst the dying bracken.

But it was long past midday—getting on for one o'clock—when she got to that narrow gap in the boundary hedge which served, as it were, as a jumping-off place for the "stronghold."

Lying low until a favourable moment occurred, she at last did her dash to the gym. Her limping run ended at that side of the building away from the more open part of the playing field and the schoolhouse.

A look-out, posted at one of the gym windows on this side, had seen her coming, and gaily some of her chums, throwing up the sash, helped her to clamber in over the sill.

"Hooray!" Naomer cheered. "Bekas, just in time for dinner—hip, pip! A gorjus dinner; a super bangquit, zis time! Bekas—"

"Something smells good, anyhow," Betty commented blithely.

"Roast pheasant," she was informed, and invited to take notice of cook, critically busy at the stove.

But Betty did not see any pheasants roasting, and it was only when she had crossed over to the stove that a most remarkable makeshift method

of dealing with the brace of birds was disclosed. "Oh, dear—ha, ha, ha, ha!" Betty burst out laughing then. "But what a good idea, Polly!"

"Unless the string catches fire and breaks!" was the madcap's grim proviso. "That's why I have to stand ready!"

Polly in fact, after getting a clear fire, had removed most of the top of the stove, so as to be able to lower the brace of pheasants down into the furnace by means of a double strand of cord. There the birds spun, over the glowing coals—grilling rather than roasting, and frequently dripping grease that took fire.

When this happened, Polly had to haul up the birds and blow them out, for the blaze always spread to them.

"Warm job, Polly!" said Betty. "Don't talk about it," fumed a very red-checked Polly. "I'm getting roasted quite as fast as the birds. But it's all for a good cause. You'll stay," she took it for granted, in a mock-grand tone, "to dinner, Betty, dear?"

"Oh, I don't like eating your rations." "What zo diggings, when you have just brought along some more fruit and sweets!" shrilled Naomer.

"Stay, and you shall have a wishbone," said Polly; "if pheasants have wishbones—do they?"

"Then I shall wish—success to the strike!" laughed Betty. "All right, girls, I'll stay—for there really is a lot to talk about."

She managed to tell it all, and to have their earnest comments on the day's sensation, whilst



For the first time Betty saw Miss Kitten without her spectacles. Betty was instantly reminded of someone else. Suddenly she remembered who it was: Joan Holland!

the pheasants were getting done to a turn—as Polly hoped.

So, when the moment came for "dishing up," there was no reason why the rebels, delighted at having Betty in their midst, should not become quite festive.

More than share Betty's concern over the strange case of Joan Holland they could not do, and to keep on talking about it would have been worse than futile.

Nor was Betty at all inclined to make it a dinner-table topic—not that there was any dinner-table in the gym.

Even "dishing up" must be regarded as a figurative expression, for again, there were no dishes—only plates, and very few of those.

Once again, it was much more like a cook-house parade by "Tommys," each girl providing the equivalent of a soldier's "dixie." They all lined up, and very slow indeed was the line in shuffling past Polly, who found the brace of pheasants more than a bit difficult to carve.

She had them laid out on a plank supported upon trestles, and there were great jokes about her dissecting the birds with the sixpenny-bazaar cutlery.

Luckily, they were so over-cooked as to be ready to fall to bits; all the same, some of the girls got mysterious helpings.

Naomer was not the only one to come back, after going away to take a look at her portion. "Bekas, what do you call zis, Polly!"

"I call that a good ration for a kid of your size!"

"And I call it ze jolly old drumstick with nothing on him! Not a bit of meat—sweendle!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Eat that first, anyhow—"

"How can I eat a bone!"

"By taking it on the mat, pet. Fall in at the end of the line, and when I come to you again, I'll see what I can do!" said cook, relenting.

"And no stuffingk, either," Naomer shrieked, marching to take her place in the line again. "Eef I had cooked zose pheasants there would have been stuffingk, and Brussels sprouts and gravy! Look out, Paula," she warned the amiable one, who was now in front of her; "see zat she doesn't palm you off with frizzled skin!"

By the favouring smile which cook had for Paula, a minute later, it seemed as if a delicious cut had been specially reserved for her. Yet when Polly had lumped something into Paula's plate, with a generous: "There you are!" the beloved duffer had to look somewhat taken aback.

"Er—"

"Roast pheasant!"

"Yes, wather, Polly deah. This portion, how-ehvah—"

"The parson's nose; great tit-bit!"

There had to be a few moments of general laughter before Paula could be assured that it was "all bunk" about the parson's nose.

Several girls declared that a pheasant didn't have one. In any case, the duffer must "push off and be thankful."

"So I should think!" snorted cook, dealing out further helpings, "Some of you expect a strike to be a picnic!"

"Leave some for yourself, Polly," Pam entreated, a little after this.

"I'm having mine afterwards."

"What!" was the protesting chorus. "Non-sense, Polly!"

But the madeap regarded it as the right professional spirit, to remain on duty. Not even

Betty could persuade Polly to forsake the make-shift cooking stove.

It had to be Polly who should serve out succeeding courses, after the same plates or tins had been, each time, suitably prepared. Triumphantly she offered stewed prunes, to be followed by rice, or you could have both together.

When there was room on the said plates or tins, most girls did that. Naomer, it may be mentioned, managed to find room in her "dixie"—a corned-beef tin—for prunes AND rice, and came back a second time.

"Bekas, eef there are any scrapings, Polly, I don't mind!"

"I don't suppose you do," retorted cook wittingly. "Sorry, though; all gone!"

"Zen now for some dessert! Bekas, I don't know about you others, but being on strike gives me an appetite!"

Finally, to Betty's astonishment and delight, there was even coffee for those who fancied a half-pint or so, by way of a digestive.

"My word, girls, talk about the Headland Hotel!" Betty laughed. "But I am so glad that you are as well off as this for provisions."

"Oh, we can hold out for days and days yet," Pam calmly remarked. "But somehow I can't believe that we shall have to do that. Miss Somerfield will come back, even if it's for only a flying visit."

Whilst the talk flowed on, with never anything like a suggestion of flagging spirits amongst the resolute rebels, Betty noticed how tidy and wholesome they had kept the gymnasium.

The stove consumed all litter, and with plenty of water and soap they had taken turns at keeping the whole place spic and span.

Towards three o'clock Betty remarked that she must be going. This was a good while after she had gaily joined in the happy task of cleaning up after the grand midday dinner. They all wanted her to stay on, but would not press her, as her mother was likely to be back at the hotel by now.

"She may be able to tell me something fresh about Joan Holland," Betty said. "If there is any development, girls, I will try to slip across again and let you know."

"Yes, do, Betty—do!"

There had been more talk about the vanished dance-hostess after dinner, and vaguely the rebels shared Betty's feeling that the strange affair ought to be their personal concern.

Out by that open window on the far side of gym went Betty, at a time when the non-striking Forms were all back in class for the afternoon. Glancing about as she made her limping run for the gap in the boundary hedge, she could see no one.

Miss Kitten was the only person Betty was on the look-out for. It seemed quite possible that that mistress might be lurking near the gymnasium, determined to frustrate any going to and from the building.

But as soon as Betty had scrambled through the gap in the hedge, she took it for granted that any risk of a skirmish with "the enemy" was at an end.

Yet it was out there on the waste land that she was suddenly rushed at by—Miss Kitten!

There was a "Got you!" look in the bespectacled eyes as the odious woman darted out to place herself in front of Betty, where the latter was a good deal hemmed in by the bushes.

Betty could have turned to retreat by the way she had come through the close-growing gorse; but she had the wif to realise that, with her still-

tiresome ankle, she could not run very fast. In any case, it seemed far more spirited simply to stand still, facing Miss Kitten.

"You have come from the gymnasium, Betty Barton?"

"Yes."

"I'll not have you keeping in touch with those girls," Miss Kitten said in one of her unwise rages. "That foolery might have been over by now, if you and others—those boys from Grangemoor School—had not aided them!"

"I belong to the Form that has rebelled," Betty bluntly stated, "and I am with them entirely in their struggle for fair play. Pam has only done what I would have done, had I been captain this term."

"The longer it lasts, the worse it is going to be for them at the finish. I hope they understand that!" Miss Kitten raged on. "I have a complete answer to the trumped-up stories against me. I shall not be the one to leave Morcove School in disgrace!"

"It is useless talking like that to me, Miss Kitten—"

"Girl, you are as impudent as the rest!"

"Not one of us would dream of being impudent to a mistress, if she had the respect a mistress usually wins from her girls. But you are not a real mistress—"

Betty got no further than that. In what was being said, just then, Miss Kitten must have detected a maddening reminder of the impostor that she was, for she flew at Betty in a way that only insensate rage could have rendered possible.

"You talk to me!" she hissed wildly, now that she had Betty tightly gripped by one arm. "If I can't deal with the others I'll deal with you! I'll—"

"Miss Kitten, stop! Be careful!" Betty warned her before starting to struggle. "Don't you dare—"

"I'm going to box your ears; give you such a beating—"

"You are not! Let me go—"

"Let you go, indeed!"

Then Betty began to struggle. She saw that she must battle with this woman as one who was so overwrought that she seemed hardly responsible for her actions.

Already she—Betty—was being shaken furiously and slapped about the head. But in another moment or two she so exerted herself that she not only wrenched free of the infuriated woman, but was able to give her a violent push to make her fall away.

It was a thrust that sent Miss Kitten reeling backwards, and suddenly her glasses, which had become dislodged during the scuffle, dropped away from her face.

The first thing any shortsighted person does, when spectacles have accidentally fallen off, is to see about recovering them; but, somehow, Miss Kitten seemed to do this with an extra haste.



"Once and for all, Betty, I will have no dealings with go-betweens," Miss Massingham said. And so, Betty realised, the vital news that she had brought—news that might have ended the strike—could not yet be revealed.

At first, Betty attributed the wild haste to pick up the glasses to their owner's intention to dash at her again, and she would have seized the chance to turn and run away, but bewilderment held her transfixed.

For the very first time she was seeing the mistress without her glasses, and the difference was startling.

It was not simply that the absence of glasses made a big difference to Miss Kitten's looks. Now they were looks that seemed vaguely to remind Betty of somebody else!

Of whom was it she was being reminded?

In that brief moment of excitement she had not time to consider this question, although it was definitely in her mind. Somewhere, at some time or other, she had seen someone who closely resembled Miss Kitten WITHOUT her glasses.

Already, however, the raging woman had snatched up her spectacles from the grass, and Betty, casting off the arresting effect of puzzlement, turned about and ran off as fast as she could.

CHAPTER 6.

Betty Gets Busy

THE infirm ankle might be a hindrance still, but at least Betty had energy enough to keep on running, dodging amongst the bushes and working all the while towards the road that would take her to the hotel.

Nor did Miss Kitten give chase. As soon as Betty reached the road, she was able to drop

to walking pace. Whilst getting her breath back, she thought to herself: That encounter with the "Tyrant" had provided a sample of the ungovernable rage with which other girls had had to contend. But what a curious thing it was, that resemblance to someone else, after the glasses had dropped off. Now, who could it be, of whom there had been such a definite reminder?

And then Betty's mind found an answer so sensational that she cried it aloud to herself:

"Why, of course—Joan Holland!"

The vanished dance mistress, and no other, was the person whom Miss Kitten resembled, when not wearing spectacles.

But Betty's brain could do better than this even, now that it had established the association of ideas. Just as suddenly she remembered that "Joan Holland" was suspected of assuming that name. Handkerchiefs of hers had been found, embroidered with initials that did not stand for Joan Holland. One of the initials was K.

"K for Kitten!" Betty realised, in still greater excitement. "Oh, to goodness! Is 'Joan Holland,' then, a Miss Kitten? A sister of Morcove's Miss Kitten, perhaps? But in that case—"

Betty found herself turning to go back to the school. Now—now, what a sensational theory this was that had taken shape in her mind. Astounding, and yet—didn't it fit in with many of the circumstances surrounding the case of "Joan Holland"? That young woman's silence as to how she had come into possession of the lost money—

Such a rapid putting together of the mental jigsaw puzzle did Betty's brain accomplish, by the time she was at the school bounds again she had decided to seek an interview with Miss Massingham.

Much as she, Betty, longed to rush to the gym and tell her rebel schoolmates, it was far more imperative to get word with Miss Massingham—at once!

Half-past three had chimed by the time Betty got back to the school bounds, so she knew that the non-striking girls were out of class. Making for the school gateway, she turned in there to see a good many girls in the open air; but, as before, they were keeping away from the gym.

She was instantly observed, and there was a good deal of running up to her; but all attempts to draw her into talk about the strike were met with the affable plea that she could not stop then, much as she would have liked to mingle with the girls.

But not a word did Betty say as to why she was now in such haste to call at the schoolhouse. She had the wisdom to realise, this was only a theory she was acting upon, and to speak before you were certain was always a dangerous thing to do.

Polly and other strikers were watching from a gymnasium window on this side of the building, and Betty wondered what they were thinking of her—making for the schoolhouse! She waved to them, but would not let any hailing cries tempt her to alter her course.

Another minute and she was at the schoolhouse porch. Being on the roll of the school, she felt entitled to walk straight in, and she would even have made for Miss Massingham's private room without troubling a parlourmaid to announce her; but Ellen—that favourite amongst the Morcove maids—chanced to come by in the front hall.

"Hallo, Ellen!" Betty sparkled.

"Why, it's Miss Betty—"

"You still know me, then?"

"Know you, miss!"

"Ellen, I want to see Miss Massingham at once!" Betty rushed on. "Not Miss Kitten, but Miss Massingham? Perhaps you will go with me to her room, just to take in my name?"

"Certainly, miss!"

Now Betty felt very much the Morcove girl again, going with Ellen into that side passage which served Miss Massingham's private room.

The door was closed, and it gave Betty a bit of a turn to hear the mistress in talk with—Miss Kitten!

"I say, Ellen, I don't want to say what I have to say in front of Miss Kitten!" Betty quickly whispered the parlourmaid. "Still, let Miss Massingham know that I'm here and must see her—alone."

"Very good, miss."

Then Ellen, having tapped, went in, her opening of the door meaning that Miss Massingham's voice came out quite loudly into the passage. Something was being said in a rather high-pitched tone about the strikers.

"I am not going to have Miss Somerfield return to find those girls still showing defiance. Now that I have had this telegram, saying that Miss Somerfield will be back by noon, to-morrow, at nine in the morning I shall take that building by storm. I mean it. I will order the outdoor staff—the gardeners—to break open the doors and simply drive the girls out. Yes, Ellen, what is it?"

"Miss Betty, if you please—"

"What! You mean the girl who is at present with her mother at the Headland Hotel?"

"Yes, Miss Massingham; she is just outside, wanting to see you most partic—"

"I will not see Betty Barton! I will not have a word to say to anyone who has been in sympathy with those rebellious girls. Tell her so, Ellen; tell her to go away."

As Betty was bound to hear all this, it did not surprise her when Ellen came out of the room with a regretful look and the message:

"She won't see you, miss! I'm sorry, but—"

"She must see me," Betty quietly insisted. "It will be a big mistake if she refuses. I shall wait here, Ellen, that's all. You leave me, please."

Like the "sport" she was, Ellen effaced herself, and there in the passage Betty remained. Not wanting to overhear what was not intended for her ears, she would have kept away from Miss Massingham's door; but the need to do this did not arise. Almost instantly the door opened, letting out Miss Kitten.

Mistress and scholar—they confronted each other again, when less than an hour ago they had parted after that violent scene on the moor.

Betty felt quite sure that Miss Kitten would not fly at her a second time, but she expected a venomous look—and it did not come.

Instead, the Form-mistress stalked past Betty like one too distraught to pay her any heed. The spectacles were being worn again, and although Betty seized the chance to give that colourless, half-haggard face a searching scrutiny, she could not get any confirmation of that sensational impression of an hour ago. The glasses made all the difference.

No sooner had Miss Kitten stalked by than Betty went to Miss Massingham's door, intending to tap politely and then walk in. But at this instant Miss Massingham opened the door, to come out.

"How dare you!"

"Please, Miss Massingham—"

"Ellen gave you the message? Then go away—go away, this instant, I tell you!"

"But I have something important to—"

"Once and for all, Betty Barton, I will have no dealings with go-betweens! Any message—any offer that you may be wishing to submit, from those rebellious girls; keep it!"

"Oh, but this isn't—"

"Silence! You should be ashamed of yourself, Betty Barton! And for those schoolmates of yours—if they think to obtain a victory on terms, they are sadly mistaken."

"Miss Massingham," Betty was earnestly imploring again, when the irate mistress backed into the room and closed the door again.

Slam, it went, in front of Betty's face.

This, considering the help it might have been to Miss Massingham, in such a crisis, to hear about the theory, so annoyed Betty that she promptly turned away.

Her first impulse was to quit the schoolhouse as quickly as possible. Then she decided to run upstairs to the Form quarters and get a certain portable wireless set that the strikers had been wishing they had with them in the gym.

It was one belonging to Madge Minden, who liked to tune in to Queen's Hall when perhaps other girls were fancying something less "high-brow" on the school's own wireless.

Betty found the set in the study shared by Madge and Tess—one of a dozen studies all so lifeless now—and returned downstairs with it.

Loving the old school as she did, it had not been without acute anguish that she had penetrated to the Form quarters upstairs, to find it so desolate. There had been the flippant voices of Fay and Edna Denver, issuing from behind the closed door of their study; and that was all!

Those two girls—the very pair who had never been any credit to the school—still in possession, as it were; the rest of the Form gone! Driven out, although they were the girls who had Morcove's welfare ever present in their minds!

What a state of affairs it was. This great rebellion, likely to be remembered for as long as Morcove remained a school—what a page in the history of the place it had written! And the end—what was it to be?

By a side door she made her exit into the open air, so avoiding girls who were not trooping back into the schoolhouse by the front porch. For them, tea was the thing now; that tea-time in the various studies which used to be one of the jolliest hours in the whole day for Betty's Form.

Ah, well, perhaps the hour was coming fast when the Form would be in its old happy state

again. Meantime, tea this afternoon must mean another scratch meal; at the best, there was discomfort and privation, cheerfully endured for the sake of that fine cause for which they had made their stand.

Keeping to shrubby paths running close to the edge of the grounds, Betty got so secretly to the gym that she quite took the "garrison" by surprise. When it was seen that she had turned up with the wireless set, there was great jubilation.

"But look here," she spoke up to Pam and others who were at the opened window, after the set had been passed inside, "several things of tremendous importance, girls. One is, that Miss Somerfield returns to the school at midday to-morrow."

"She does!"

"And Miss Massingham has made up her mind to break the strike before then," Betty spoke on rapidly. "I was bound to hear her telling Miss Kitten, and I feel entitled to warn you. First thing to-morrow morning the gym doors are to be forced, and you will all be—rounded up, I suppose!"

"Will we!" was Polly's contribution to the chorus of comment. "What do you say, Pam?"

"I say—thanks to Betty, for letting us know, that's all," was the captain's serene reply. "Anything else, Betty dear?"

"Yes! I've been almost bursting to tell you. I've a sudden theory that Miss Kitten is related to the vanished dance-hostess!"

"Wha-a-t!"

"Remember, the letter 'K' is one of Joan Holland's real initials. What's more, if you remember this too, Miss Kitten was at the hotel the evening mother lost her bag with the money in it."

"Good-gracious!" gasped some of Betty's excited listeners.

"Bekas, at zat rate, Betty—"

"Just so! Miss Kitten may have been the finder of the bag; may have stuck to it; may have passed some of the money to 'Joan Holland'—"

"Who didn't know that it was money that had been found and kept!" Polly caught up Betty. "Gee! And so 'Joan Holland' has been keeping silent to shield—our Miss Kitten! Oh, help!"

"But how amazing!" Pam exclaimed, almost as excited as any of them for once. "Betty, if what you suspect is true, then—"

"I went to Miss Massingham about it, feeling that I ought to do so, at once; but she wouldn't listen to a word—banged the door in my face," Betty hastily narrated. "So I've come away, and now—well, it must be left to time to prove, I suppose, whether I'm right or wrong. It isn't a thing to start spreading all over the place, is it?"

"But you'll tell your mother, Betty?"

"Oh, rather," Pam was promptly answered. "Now I must hurry back to the hotel, to go into things with mother. So it is good-bye once again, girls, for the present," Betty added quickly. "Best of luck, and don't forget about to-morrow morning, will you?"

"Not likely!"

Nor did they.

The rebels first talk amongst themselves, after Betty had made off once more, was about her sensational theory in regard to Miss Kitten and the dance-hostess.

Pam and her followers could visualise tremendous happenings ere long; could imagine revelations likely to justify them, a thousand times

The Ever Open Door

The Christmas-time problem of such institutions as Dr. Barnardo's Homes, with their task of providing a fair share of good things for the 8,500 small folks of all ages in their care, should be a National concern. Day in and day out all through the year, Barnardo's "Ever Open Doors" are receiving waifs whose destitution lays a claim upon us all.

Everybody will wish not only that "Father Christmas" should visit these little unfortunates, and bring to them the gifts children so dearly love, but that Barnardo's should be enabled to provide all the other necessities of life—food, clothing and housing—for their big family throughout the year, not forgetting the added comforts of good hot dinners and warm blankets during these colder months.

By using the Christmas trees inserted in our current issue, readers will help to make this possible.

over, in their having "struck" against Miss Kitten.

But this likelihood only made the rebels all the more determined to keep the flag flying to the very moment when it could be lowered without humiliation—peace with honour!

Force, threatened for to-morrow morning, could not be met with force. Pam, at any rate, would not hear of it. On the other hand, she was as determined as any not to submit to any routing out.

"Miss Massingham should have listened to Betty," was the thing Pam could not forget. "If she had done that, by this time Miss Massingham might have been serving the school to real advantage."

"That is so," Polly agreed hotly. "Dash it all, there was the way to end the strike—by acting on information which Betty was ready to place in her hands! And instead, Miss Massingham plans—a storming of the stronghold, pooh!"

"Yes, well," Pam said, and there was the old serene smile once more; "let her do it, girls. Let her turn up in the morning, to have the doors forced by the gardeners. Even that won't end the strike. We shan't be here, that's all!"

"Pam!" a dozen of them fairly yelled together,

for they had never supposed that she would out with such a daring suggestion as that.

But Pam had meant it when she said it. Another instance of the old, old truth; the greatest lovers of forbearance, the most zealous workers for peace—they make the toughest fights when war has come about.

By the time darkness was setting in, plans had been settled and all preparations made. Not until several hours later, however, did the thrilling movement take place by which Miss Massingham was to be circumvented.

Then, under cover of night, they all slipped away!

By twos and threes they climbed out over the high sill of a window facing away from the distant schoolhouse.

By twos and threes they crept to the boundary hedge, each girl burdened with a fair share of the food supplies and equipment.

Even the remainder of the fuel was being portered away, in improvised bags. The candles, the matches, the makeshift "dixies"—all went with the rebel Form, in its secret withdrawal to a certain spot where the spirited stand could still continue.

Pam, as befitted a leader, went first, to be there at the gap in the hedge when others came creeping after. As for Polly Linton, she came out last of all, leaving one light burning in the gym, and leaving the wireless switched on!

The blinds were all lowered at the gym windows, and Polly, the last girl to leave, drew down the sash of that window by which the entire party had made its exit. Hugging her portion of "kit," she nipped across to the hedge and found Pam waiting for her.

The others had all gone through the gap and were mustered on the outer side of the hedge. Such was the sense of discipline, not a whisper was heard, nor would any of those girls think of setting off until Pam, rejoining them with Polly, should give the signal.

"Sure you left everything all right, Polly?" "Quite, quite sure! I say, Pam, anyone really would think we are still there—all of us!" the madcap whispered. "That one light, behind the blinds."

"And—hark!" said Pam, very softly. "Even from this distance you can just hear the wireless. I only hope there will be something on in the morning."

"If there is—what a surprise for Miss Massingham!" Polly chuckled. "Oh, how I'd like to see her face when she has the doors forced!"

"Miss Massingham has been, I think, a disappointment," murmured Pam. "Twice, the chance to end this strife, and twice—she has missed it."

"And so—" Polly breathed, fuming to get away.

Pam motioned her to scramble through the gap in the hedge. After Polly had done this, Pam followed; and then, to a girl, the rebels were all together once more.

The autumn night was calm, mild, and groping dark.

"Yes, well," Pam said, "we know the way

Just like Pam to say only that and nothing more!

She led off, and the others filed after her, light of tread and still keeping a guard upon their lips, questing that fresh shelter which they had resolved to seek—beyond the school bounds!

[END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.]

THEIR FIGHT FOR THE RIGHT

DETERMINED not to be beaten, the Morcove strikers seek a new and secret stronghold—a stronghold that is destined to be the scene of their last great stand against tyranny.

Next Tuesday's powerful long complete story brings to a dramatic climax the intensely exciting situation in which the Morcove rebels have played such an out-standing part.

Do not fail to read:

"THE FORM'S LAST STAND"



By
**Marjorie
Stanton**

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