



When Sisters Schemed

By Marjorie Stanton

Study 12's Famous Chums in a Brilliant Long Complete Story of Morcove School

CHAPTER I.

Planned In Secret

"I SAY, Fay—what do you think?"

"About what, Edna? About Morcove—I think lots of things, none of them exactly complimentary!"

And Fay Denver, having answered her sister Edna in this flippant way, gave her usual careless grin.

"Oh, but this is about Polly Linton," came Edna's excited remark. "Something I'm ever so glad to have found out! I think we may be able to turn it to good account!"

"Oh?"
"Yep!"

Edna Denver, very obviously, felt a need for secrecy. She had closed the door directly after she had entered this study which she shared with her sister Fay at Morcove School. Now she went back to the door and took a wary peep into the passage, as if to make sure that no one was hanging about who would be likely to listen at the keyhole.

As Edna herself was much given to that sort of thing, it was almost natural that she should imagine other Morcove girls to be fond of prying. But they weren't.

"We've both been noticing lately—haven't we, Fay?—that Polly has been worrying about something. And now," Edna whispered exultantly, "I know what it is!"

"You do?" said Fay, starting up from an easy chair in great eagerness to hear more. "I say, that's good!"

"And I can tell you this," the younger sister whispered on, "there is only one other person in the school who knows. Usually, all those Study 12 girls share one another's confidences. But in this case Betty Barton is the only one whom Polly has confided in."

"That's strange!"
"Yes, but there happens to be good reason why it is being kept from the others," Edna grinned. "You see, it is something that makes Polly Linton feel ashamed—of her brother."

"What! Ashamed of Jack? Edna, you must have got it all wrong—"

"I know I haven't!" was the confident retort. "I had the luck to overhear quite a long talk between Polly and Betty, only five minutes ago—a secret talk, when their chums were out of the way. And so I found out—everything!"

"But look here, Edna; when Jack Linton was over at Morcove, the other day, with his Grange-moor pals, Polly seemed to be just as proud of him as ever. No sign of—"

"She was taking good care, Fay, not to show any sign. But the fact remains; she knows he is in an awful tangle—can't save himself, and so, of course, she is at her wits' end to know how to save him herself!"

By now, the elder sister was thoroughly infected with Edna's own excitement. So that they

could talk on in even deeper whispers, the two girls stood closer together.

"Listen," Edna said under her breath. "This is what I have found out. There's a certain fellow who has got Jack Linton on toast. The fellow holds a letter which, if it fell into the hands of Jack's father, or the headmaster at Grangemoor, would just about create a first-class row. It's something to do with gambling debts. Jack himself must be worried out of his life. As for Polly—I heard her say to Betty, it has just about broken her heart."

Fay did not receive this with any sign of sympathy for either Polly Linton or her brother Jack. Like Edna, excessively pretty Fay could only gloat over the discovery as being something full of selfish possibilities.

"Who is the fellow who holds the paper? Do you know, Edna?"

"Yes! Steve Marshall—"

"But he's a friend of our Cousin Bertie!"

"I know he is!" Edna nodded and smiled. "And that's just where our chance comes in of making something out of this! Look here, Fay; you ought to be able to get Bertie to get hold of that paper and let us have it!"

"Do what, Edna?"

"Cousin Bertie will do anything for you—now, won't he?" the younger sister argued rejoicingly.

"And I don't suppose for a moment that he has any real friendship for the Marshall chap. Steve Marshall has left school and is only rotting about at home at Gorslands. He seems to have been palling with a number of fellows at Grangemoor, and Bertie is one. But—"

"But, Edna, supposing I did get Bertie to do as you suggest; supposing he did get hold of the letter for us? Oh, but I see the idea!" Fay rushed on, with the next breath. "We could hold it over Polly's head—just as Steve Marshall has been holding it over Jack Linton's head!"

Edna's immediate response was a nod and a laugh. She dropped back into an easy chair and, lying back, looked up into her sister's face, enjoying its delighted expression.

"Not a bad wheeze, eh, Fay?"

"If—if only we could!" muttered the elder sister, pacing about the study. "It isn't that a hold over Polly in particular would be much good to us. But Polly is Study 12! Polly is the captain's dearest chum! A hold over Polly means—a hold over the captain! And I'd give anything to get one in at Betty."

"And that, I say, is something worth while!" Edna rejoined, bounding up from her chair.

"Just do as we like, so far as the captain is concerned, once that letter is in our hands! Twist that precious captain round our little fingers, we will! So the question is, Fay—how soon can you get busy about it all?"

"Get a talk with Bertie, you mean?" The elder sister was narrowing her eyes now, as she did some hard thinking. "It's a halfer to-morrow afternoon; I might manage it then. Lead up to the matter very carefully—"

"Oh, there's no need to be so frightfully careful," shrugged Edna. "I'm sure Bertie doesn't care a hang for the Marshall chap really. On the other hand, Bertie is a cousin of ours, and if he won't do this thing for us—for you, Fay!"

"Take it that he is quite willing to try, as soon as I tell him," Fay burst out. "I wonder, will it be possible?"

"I would say—easy! There they are, two fellows who go about a bit together. It's not like Polly, wanting to get hold of a letter which is probably in Steve Marshall's coat pocket. In

her case—well, only a sort of desperation, a chance to save her brother—can have made her hope to get hold of it. But Bertie—he should find it easy!"

Fay brought up a wrist to glance excitedly at her watch.

Then she moved to the table, sat down, and fumbled out a wad of notepaper.

"Here, Edna, I'm going to write to Bertie now. Get it off by the next post! Then Bertie will get it at the school, to-night."

"Well, I think it's worth it—I do, really!"

And, looking very jaunty over the "wheeze," Edna passed from the study, so that her sister might get on all the faster with the letter, by being alone.

There was still half an hour to go to dinner-time, which accounted for the Form quarters being so lifeless. With few exceptions, Morcove girls always hurried out to the great playing field or to the gym, directly after morning school.

With no idea of joining in any of the games, Edna Denver went downstairs and out to the field. Something in her crafty, heartless nature made her want to flaunt in front of certain schoolmates.

She wanted, as it were, to treat Polly and the Form captain to a marked-down look, to see those two at hockey practice and to be able to think:

"There they are, and Fay and I are going to hold them—in the hollow of our hands!"

Power over others—power! Meat and drink, that, to natures such as Fay and Edna's.

"All in good time!" was what Edna could say to herself, when she saw Polly with Betty and others, getting a bustling practice game. "You wait, my girls!"

In a few minutes the game finished, and those who had taken part began to saunter off the field, some twirling their hockey-sticks, others putting on "woollies" that had been taken off for the game. A jolly lot, and Betty and Polly as jolly as any. So Miss Merriek, the Form-mistress, must have thought, had she been here.

But Edna Denver knew that every laugh which Polly raised, so as to be still the madcap in front of other girls, was forced. And Betty, the one chum to whom the madcap had confided her secret, was assuredly just as anxious.

"Only a quarter-to?" cried Betty, as the school chimed ding-dong'd. "Then we've time to go upstairs."

"Fow a wealome west, yes, wather!" beamed Paula Creel, out of whose slender frame the strenuous game had taken the last half-ounce of energy. But that dusky imp, Naomer Nakara could see a quite different reason for resorting to Study 12.

"Bekas, a jolly good winter-warmer, zat is my mark! Ze grand patent clove-coriol, as hot as you can make him. And," Naomer suddenly spoke towards a very impudent-looking Edna, "you needn't stare at us like zat, bekas—"

"Stare—pooh! I wasn't even thinking about any of you!" Edna disclaimed, with a haughty toss of the head. "Just as if!"

She stalked away, and the excessive pertness of her step was noticed. It meant, as the chums of Study 12 knew from ample experience, that Edna Denver had something "up her sleeve."

Then Betty and Co. passed into the schoolhouse, to find Fay Denver going to the post-box in the front hall with just such a pert step as her sister's had been.

Fay shot the letter into the box, and then, as she skimmed past the chums, she seemed to shake with inward laughter, as if enjoying a joke at their expense.

"Something amuses her," Betty said scornfully to Polly. "I don't know what it can be—do you?"

"I'm sure I don't!" shrugged Polly. "And I don't care. Got more to trouble about than that."

"Ah, I know you have," the captain answered very softly.

And the pair of them looked at each other, wondering where it was all to end.

CHAPTER 2

"Only A Waster, Now!"

TWO mornings later, Fay and Edna had a letter from that Cousin Bertie who was a "pre" at Grangemoor School.

It came into her hands when girls' letters were handed out at Morcove, directly after breakfast. There had been time for her merely to start reading, after opening the letter, when Fay became aware of her sister's nudgings.

"What's the news, Fay?"

Then Fay nudged a cautious: "Come upstairs!" in return. She would never have stopped to read the letter right through, down here in the thronged hall. The very first lines had thrown her into a state of great excitement.

So she and Edna raced aloft to their study, two stairs at a time. Slam! went their study door, and then Fay was free to prance around, gaily waving the letter.

"But what?" clamoured Edna. "He is willing to try for us, is he?"

"Try!" laughed Fay. "He's already done it!"

"Never!" gasped the younger sister. "You don't mean—he's got that letter from you-know-who?"

"But that's exactly what I do mean, because it is exactly what he says in his letter. Wait a bit," Fay pleaded, and went on reading.

Edna, although on fire with feverish impatience, could not expect to have the letter read aloud to her. She never was allowed to see Cousin Bertie's letters to Fay, or Fay's to him.

"Yes!" Fay broke out at last. "He can hand that paper—the Jack Linton 'dossier,' Bertie calls it—to me, the next time we meet! Oh, Edna, isn't it simply wonderful!"

"Splendid! How quick Bertie must have been, Fay! How on earth did he—"

"Why, he got my letter the night before last at Grangemoor School, and yesterday gave him a chance. It so happened he was over at Gorselands yesterday for a game of snooker, I suppose," Fay whispered, "they had their coats off in the billiards-room. And Bertie was able to go to the other fellow's coat whilst it was hanging up."

"Anyhow!" said Edna, softly clapping her hands. "If he's got it—he's got it! But I'd much rather we had it, Fay! He will hand it over to us?"

"He says so. Didn't he do it for us?" snapped Fay.

"Yes, but— Well! We know he has no use for Jack Linton. So it wouldn't have surprised me if Bertie had decided to keep the 'dossier' as a stick with which to beat Jack."

Fay stood an inch taller. "Bertie will do anything for me!" she felt entitled to say proudly. "I wanted the Jack Linton paper, and I've got it."

"Not yet, you haven't," Edna reminded her sister tartly. "But I suppose we can rely upon having it by Saturday—the day after tomorrow?"

"Bertie has asked me to meet him on Saturday afternoon. You can come, too, if you like," Fay was graciously pleased to say. "He'll give me the 'dossier' then."

Once again Edna clapped in delight. "Oh, that's good enough!" she declared ecstatically. "Saturday afternoon! So, Fay darling, if we want to make it a bit of a spree and get back late—we shall know how to deal with the captain, if she talks of reporting us. I call that," Edna chuckled, "simply lovely—ha, ha, ha!"

Fay nodded. She was reading the letter again. Cousin Bertie must have penned certain closing lines that appealed to her flirtatious nature. She looked highly pleased, with a slightly heightened colour in her cheeks, as she finally tore up the letter.

"He suggests that I meet him in Barncombe,



"Some chocs, Polly—for a good girl!" Jack tested, but his sister would not take the proffered box. "I don't want them," she said. For how could she accept a gift from Jack, when she believed that he had been gambling?

for a run to Sandton Bay. If the weather keeps decent—"

"Oh, we'll have a crashing afternoon, rather!" Edna struck in. "Such an awful long time since we DID get a real spree," she grinned. "And I won't. Fay darling, be under your feet all the time—you know that very well. You can leave me on the front, and I'll—Hallo, do you hear that?"

She moved to the door and stood it slightly open, so as to hear more. Someone had called out for Polly Linton:

"Wanted on the 'phone!"

In a few moments racing steps in the corridor told Fay and Edna that Polly had flashed by, making for the stairs.

"It's your brother, Polly," they heard her being informed. "Ringing up from Grangemoor."

Edna closed the door again. She turned to her sister.

"Jack Linton, ringing up like that, Fay! Now I wonder what it means?"

FIVE minutes more, and Polly Linton was whirling into Study 12, where Betty sat attending to some captaincy work in this spare half-hour before morning school.

"Well, I can't make it out, Betty! I feel—I don't know—flummoxed!"

"Why, what?" Clacking down a pencil, Betty rose. This dear chum of hers was looking acutely distressed again.

"Just imagine," Polly panted. "Jack rang up to ask if some of us could arrange an outing with him and the other boys, for Saturday afternoon. He—he wants to stand treat!"

"Do what?" gasped Betty.

"Stand the lot of us—a treat!" Polly insisted grimly. "He'd like to make it Sandton Bay—tea at the Ocean Café—and so will we try and get permish."

"Oh, there'd be no difficulty," Betty exclaimed. "And, of course, weather like this—topping! But how—how on earth can Jack be thinking of outings, and paying for all if we'll let him, when we know very well he's in debt already?"

Polly nodded.

"I know!" She sat down, sweeping a hand across her forehead as if it were hot. "That's what gets me, Betty! Here have I been worrying myself about the money he owes that Marshall cad—more money than I could ever have imagined Jack scraping together! And yet he takes it into his head to stand treat to about a dozen of us!"

Silence fell between these two, so fortunately alone together at this moment. They stared at each other in sorrow as well as perplexity. To both girls, the only explanation was that Jack must be going from bad to worse.

The recklessness which had got him into the clutches of Steve Marshall had developed into a reckless decision not to trouble to pay off the debt, even if funds became available!

"What did you say to Jack, over the 'phone, Polly?"

"What I very nearly said was that if he was as well off as all that, he had better settle with Steve Marshall instead of going on the bust. How he's got the money, I can't think!"

She had no sooner said this, than she gave a cry of dismay.

"Unless, Betty—unless he's come by it through some fresh bit of folly! Oh, if he's been gambling again, and has won for once!"

"But—Polly darling—"

"Winning is as bad as losing—"

"Of course it is, dear. But, about Saturday—"

"I won't go to Sandton!"

"And yet, Polly, I think perhaps we ought to go. It may keep him away from bad company. We won't, of course, let him foot the bill. We'll all pay for ourselves. I know, dear, you'll be happier in a way if you are with him for the halfer—"

"I don't know that I shall be!"

"Oh, you will be, Polly, when the time comes. And Judy will like to see her brother—"

"Judy has a brother to be proud of still. Dave doesn't change," Polly exclaimed, with a touch of impatience. "Dave doesn't go mixing with rotters who are only out to fleece you at cards, or betting, or whatever it is. But, there; if you think it may do some good for us to fall in with the idea—"

"And I do! We have no fixture for Saturday," Betty rattled on. "So we'll see if it can be arranged. Bike to Barncombe, meet the boys there, then all go by coach to Sandton Bay—"

"Hi, what's zat about Sandton Bay?" yelled Naomer, as she burst in, just in time to hear Betty's closing words. "When—when?"

"Next Saturday, we hope—"

"An outing, do you mean? With tea at ze Ocean Café?"

"And Jack and his chums are coming, yes," Betty smiled. "So you'll see Tubby—"

"Hip, pip!" capered the imp of Study 12. "Gorjus! Bekas, eet is ages since we had a treat like zat! Ooo, where is my money, to see how much I have got!"

And the dusky one darted to pull open her table-drawer, to take out that "home safe" of hers, which consisted of an old peppermint tin.

As for Betty, she sped away to sound the Form-mistress, so as to know at once whether the idea would be entertained or not. It behoved Betty to do this, being the captain.

No objection was raised. With her usual good nature, Miss Merrick immediately consulted the headmistress, who gave her consent. So Study 12 knew how it stood, in regard to Saturday, by the time the bell went for morning school.

Study 12, on Saturday next, was to have a jaunt to Sandton Bay. Jack and his three best chums of Grangemoor would companion the girls. Miss Merrick might be in the party, and again, she might not. Study 12 did not know for certain about that.

Nor did Betty and Co. know that the Denver sisters would be at Sandton on Saturday afternoon—with their cousin from Grangemoor School!

CHAPTER 3.

"Easy Come, Easy Go!"

"LOOK, there are the boys—"

"Yes—"

"Hooray! Bekas, nice and early for bagging good seats in ze jolly old moty-coach!"

The chums of Study 12 were making their way on foot along Barncombe's narrow High Street, having "parked" their bicycles in the Creamery's bakehouse-yard.

An open space in front of the town hall was in view, and there stood Jack Linton, Dave Cardew, Jimmy Cherrol, and "Tubby" Bloat.

The four boys were obviously in tiptop spirits. Various folk of the town, waiting about for one or another of the motor-coaches, were not in the holiday mood which was rendering Jack and his chums so jovial.

Even Judy's brother Dave—such a level-headed, serious fellow though he was—seemed to be infected with some of that levity which was particularly noticeable in Jack.

"We were just coming to look for you girls in the Creamery," Jack said, after the first burst of greetings. "I suppose you looked in there?"

"We did not," Polly sauced back, as if she were in her normal madcap state.

"Not to buy some chocs for the journey?" her brother grimaced. "I thought I was going to be offered one. As it is—'Hallo!' he said, suddenly displaying a mammoth box which he had been holding behind him. "Where did these come from! Open 'em, Polly."

"No! I don't want them," she refused—so curtly that some of the other girls laughed. Only Betty was to know that Polly was not pretending to be pettish over the chocolates. The refusal to accept them was really a flash of angry indignation—that Jack should have squandered money on the sweets.

"Wow!" said Jack. "What can one do with a cross-patch sister, boys?" He turned this into a "chanty," and began to sing:

"What shall we do with a cross-patch sister?
What shall we do with a cross-patch sister?
What shall we do with a cross-patch sister?
So early in the morning!"

He might, at least, have known what to do with the chocolates—hand them to Naomer. But already rotund Robert Bloot had lugged out a box of best assorted as an offering to the dusky one on the altar of friendship.

"Perfect afternoon, Jimmy," Pam Willoughby turned to say to Jimmy Cherrol, finding him regarding her with the usual attention to her every word and movement. "We all ought to be at games; but this is jolly."

"Bigger treat for us chaps than it is for you girls," Jimmy shyly declared. "You've got the sea right under your eyes at Morcove. At Grangemoor, we're not like that."

"But the sea is so different at Sandton—I mean, the shore is. And, anyway," Pam sparkled, "other things beside the sea make it jolly—all this!"

"Our coach?" questioned Madge Minden, as one came lumbering round from the depot to pick up passengers. "Yes!" as she read "SAND-TON BAY" on the indicator.

"All aboard, boys!" Jack vociferated. "Booked seats—"

"What!" gasped the entire batch of girls. "I took tickets in advance," Jack carelessly explained. "One too many, as it happens, Miss Merrick being a non-starter. But that'll give us all the more room for Tubby. Come on, boys!"

The coach had pulled up and was ready to receive them all. Polly, however, put a dramatic check upon any inclination on the part of her chums to get in and argue about payment for the fare afterwards. She stood still, and she flushed as she stared at Jack.

"I think I'll be a non-starter, too!" she suddenly blazed out; and now there could be no imagining that this was only her usual nonsense. "You had no right, Jack, to book seats!"

"Is—that—so?" he drawled. "I told you, by letter; we weren't going to have this outing at your expense!"

"Oh, yeah," he grinned. "I know we can settle up with you for the fares, afterwards," Polly spoke on hotly. "But you—you seem to be wanting to make a splash—"

"Nunno," Jack pleaded pleasantly. "Gosh, Polly, should hope you know me better than to think I want to swank. I only thought I might throw a party—"

"And you can't afford to!"

"Is—that—so?"

"Oh!" And she stamped. "It isn't funny! I believe in being just before I'm generous! But we can't keep the coach waiting. I'll go, because I know that we girls can all settle up with you, afterwards. We shall insist!"

"Come off it, Polly—"

"Don't speak to me, Jack! I'm—I'm—"

Heartbroken, she might have said; but no word of any sort came to describe her feelings. Biting

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an underlip, she moved on to climb the two or three steps by which the coach was entered.

Jack walked after her and, overtaking her, put a hand affectionately upon her shoulders. She shook him off.

"Wow!" he mourned again, comically. And then suddenly he roared his laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha! My dreadful past, boys; that's what it means. Yes, of course; never been known to have a penny on me, and so— Ha, ha, ha! All right, Polly-wolly; no offence taken! None meant, I'm sure!"

For a few moments he was kept, still in a chuckling state, tendering the tickets bought in advance to the driver-conductor.

Other passengers followed the party of scholars into the coach and found seats. Jack himself was last of all to enter—just as the luxurious vehicle was moving off.

"Fares, please!" he jested, staggering about between the well-filled seats. "Bank! Marble Arch! Oxfo' Cirs's!"

Judy and Dave were sitting together. But Polly had refused to have a vacant seat left for

Jack to take, next to herself. She had said a quick: "Here you are, Betty!" and so well did that chum appreciate Polly's wrought-up state, there had been a silent acceptance of the invitation.

"This being my treat," came Jack's mock-mournful voice, a minute later, "I had thought I might sit next to Polly. But no! 'Tis a hard world, my friends. What have I done to deserve it!"

"Never mind, Jack!" shrilled Naomer. "Bekas—"

And her opened box of chocolates came on offer.

"They look," he sighed jestingly, "all hard centres! Life, I tell you, is like that—hard!"

But next moment—his teeth having crushed through a huge chocolate of exceptional softness and richness—he assumed a happy smile.

"I am a man again, Tubby! You might tell my sister"—for Jack was sitting a good way behind Polly in the coach—"tell her that I meant well! And perhaps, someday—who knows?—she will say: 'With all his faults, I love him still! He was a man, take him for all in all!'"

That this nonsense did not serve as a cue to Polly, to speak back to him mock-witheringly, surprised most of the others. But Betty—

There sat Betty, beside the dear chum who was, she knew, in misery over Jack.

Betty herself was going to get no real pleasure out of the trip. Of that she was certain. The best purpose it could serve her and Polly alike, was to enable them to have him under their eyes. If there had been no such outing together, like this, then he might have resorted to bad company.

That he had, of late, formed most undesirable associations, neither his anguish-stricken sister nor Betty could doubt. He must have taken to slipping away from sterling chums like Dave and Jimmy and Tubby, to mix in secret with fellows of whom Steve Marshall was a sample.

All the way to Sandton, Jack was the life and soul of the party. His amusing patter was certainly as spontaneous as it ever had been, and his three schoolmates evidently did not know of any reason why he should not be full of fun.

On the contrary, those three lads frequently displayed an extra degree of levity themselves, so that it was quite obvious to Betty and Polly that this was a care-free hour for the boys.

Nor had any of the three looked at all upset when Polly had flown at Jack about his intending, after all, to pay for others. There had even been some quiet grinning, as if they knew that Jack had had a windfall.

So he must have done! But what else could his sister and Betty suppose but that it was a case of easy-come, easy-go. He had lost more than he could afford to do, a short time ago, and had been able not to worry.

Now he had won money by some disgraceful means or other—and was in the mood to "go on the bust"! The only explanation, this—and how tragic it all seemed to Betty and Polly.

All Sandton was basking in the strong sunshine when the coach drew up on the new-looking parade. The little seaside town was one that had sprung up in recent years, and so the entire seaford, with its promenade and rows of shops and cafés, looked very new and all the cleaner and brighter for that.

To get down from the roomy coach, was to lose the faint smell of petrol fumes and find a special saltiness in the wind blowing in from the sea.

After the hum of the engine, it was fine to hear

the boom and crash of the great waves, running at high tide along the shingly slope. Gulls were screaming as they winged above the yeasty surf, and a flag fluttered gaily at the head of Sandton's flagstaff.

"Only a quarter to three," Betty commented. "So we have quite a nice bit of time in hand."

"In fact, boys," chimed in Jack breezily, "we might begin with a look in at the Ocean Café, across the way? And THEN a bit of a stroll, to get up a real appetite for tea—what say?"

"Gorjus! Bekas—"

Then Polly, at the edge of the pavement—ready to cross over with the rest of the party—stopped dead, glaring at Jack again.

"Do you think you are going to take us in there and—"

"My dear old Polly-wolly, do let a chap enjoy himself for once," Jack protested wearily. "It's quite all right—"

"You know very well it isn't!" she retorted so fiercely that Madge and others stared at her in pained surprise. It was being realised at last that she was really annoyed with Jack.

"How do you mean?" he asked, colouring a little now that he, too, knew his sister's anger to be real.

"If you are in funds to this extent—how did you get the money?" Polly asked.

"Well, how did I?" he smiled teasingly. "Backing a winner, perhaps! Oh, Polly-wolly, you are in a funny mood to-day," he added, becoming serious again. "Look here, these chaps know; I was promising myself a bit of pleasure over this jaunt, and they didn't see why I shouldn't have it. Now I'll ask the girls!"

He turned to them all, as they stood bunched at the kerb, their faces expressing dismay at the scene Polly was making.

"Take it that I've had a bit of a windfall," he exclaimed quite earnestly. "Take it that my greatest pleasure is to see something of Polly and all of you on a nice halfer like this, in the middle of term. Is it anything very terrible for a chap to want to spend a bit of the money that way? I mean, is it swank, or is it—well, just a sort of feeling that it would be mean not to pay for all, when I have had such luck?"

"But—" Polly blurted, then became tight-lipped again.

"If swank—gosh, then I'm off," Jack laughed, "to jump off a breakwater and not be seen again! You all know very well I can't stick swank! But I leave you girls to say whether you feel as Polly does."

"No!" yelled Naomer. "Bekas, what ze diggings, cef you want to celebrate, zen why shouldn't you! To go on ze bust all by yourself—now zat would be a sweendle!"

"Thank you, thank you," he bowed to the imp. "Has anyone else a kind word to say? Betty?"

"Perhaps Polly feels that you must have some better use for the money, Jack."

"Oh, heck!" he grimaced. "Put by already for next summer hols, is that it? Nunno! You don't get me taking a money-box to bed every night, to hide under my pillow."

Suddenly he went off into roar of laughter.

"You girls—ha, ha, ha!—you don't understand yet! When I say a windfall, I mean—pounds and pounds! I'm not such a guy as to want to blue every penny I've got, to-day! But I've got—Here, look, just to show you that I'd be a mean cuss to let you pay for the outing when I'm simply rolling!"

And still chuckling, he whipped a wad of currency notes from a coat-pocket.

"Now, this is swank—showing you the actual money," he remarked. "But you've forced me—or, rather, Polly has! If a chap who has come in for this, quite unexpectedly, can't stand treat, and buy Naomer a spade and pail, and yet be relied upon to remember next week's good cause on the wireless— Oh, heck; come on, boys, and let it go at that!"

He tried Polly with a smile that should have overcome any scruples which were troubling her; but she still looked him straight in the face, very grimly.

"Easy come," she said, "easy go!"

"You've said a mouthful," he agreed, and began to drone, whilst starting to cross the road:

"Easy come, easy go—"

"It's all right, Polly," came Dave's gravely smiled assurance. "Let him, if he wants to."

"Yes, Polly." Several of her Morcove chums said it together. "If it gives him pleasure—and he knows he can spare it—"

"Oh!" Polly stamped, in a maddened way. "You girls would never want to help him blue the money—of course you wouldn't! You all came, expecting to pay your shares. But—but—Dash!" she raged. "How did he get the money—there!"

"Good gwacious, Polly deah!" gasped Paula. "You don't imagine, do you, that Jack could have come by it dishonestly?"

"He talked of having backed a winner!"

"But that was only his joke!" cried Judy. "You know what he is—" she was adding earnestly, when a dramatic interruption occurred.

It took the form of a cry from one of the other girls—Helen Craig.

They found her pointing in amazement as she cried aloud:

"Just look!"

A second coach had just pulled in behind the other, to set down passengers.

And alighting from it were two Morcove girls—Fay and Edna Denver!

CHAPTER 4.

How Much Do They Know?

"BAI Jove—"

"Bekas; what ze diggings, have zey come bekas we have?"

"There's a fellow with them—"

"It's their Cousin Bertie—"

"Yes," Dave Cardew emitted. "That's Bertie Denver."

Judy turned to Betty.

"Did you know anything about this, Betty?"

"Not I. I suppose they've had permission all right. And yet—I should have thought Miss Merrick would have mentioned it, especially as those two girls have come to the same place as we have for the afternoon."

"Anyhow, it's their affair?"

"Oh, yes."

Betty, however, felt none too easy in mind. As captain, it was her duty to take note of anything that appeared to be a flouting of the school's rules. Strictly speaking, she should now have gone up to Fay and Edna and exercised a captain's right to inquire if they were here at Sand-ton by permission.

But she hated officiousness, and decided to question the two girls by-and-by. It could be done, then, with less risk of humiliating the pair.

Jack was across the road, waiting at the café doors, and as Betty's companions were now crossing over she kept with them.

"Say, boys," Jack grimaced, when they had



"Either you'll let us in late to-night—or it will be the worse for Polly," Fay threatened, and she could afford to smile, knowing what a hold she had over the Captain. But Fay was to learn that she could not so easily intimidate Betty!

all got to him, "there's that Denver fellow, with his Morcove cousins. It's a bit thick. I thought I was going to enjoy myself; but what with a sister who is as cross as two sticks, and a pre turning up who is a chap I loathe—"

"But you needn't bother about him," Madge said comfortingly.

"The mere sight of him riles me," Jack explained with a wry look. "He jars. And it's a pound to a penny that he brings those cousins of his into the café, just for the sake of annoying us. But come on in, anyhow!"

Sure enough, the Study 12 girls and the four boys were no sooner accommodated at a couple of tables put together in the pretty tea-room, than Fay and Edna flaunted upon the scene, with Bertie in attendance.

"Hallo!" the sisters acknowledged Betty and Co., with insolent aloofness, whilst Bertie first treated the Grangemoor four to an ugly look, then decided to come across to them.

"You chaps on pass for this?" he demanded grandly.

"We are," Jack nodded, and returned his eyes to the menu card.

"Well, how about standing up when a pro speaks to you?" scowled Bertie. "Right!" he muttered, as the four refused to stand up. "I'll remember it!"

He lounged away to seat himself at his cousins' table, and then Betty rose and went across to

those two girls. As Bertie Denver had not hesitated to question his schoolmates' right to be there, she felt entitled to question Fay and Edna just as publicly. Tit for tat!

"Might I ask," she addressed the sisters, ignoring Bertie's resentful stare, "if you have permission to be here?"

"What's it to do with you?" bridled Fay.

"As captain—"

"Oh, run away and play!" Fay snapped, and then laughed along with Edna.

"Then I suppose," Betty said in a level voice, "Miss Merrick knows nothing about this?"

"Find out!"

"I shall have to."

"And report us? You dare!" Fay hissed. "You'll be sorry for it afterwards, I promise you that."

"Oh, do you?"

"Yes! There are worse things, Betty Barton, than two sisters going out with a cousin for the afternoon."

"If you mean, I and my chums being here with Jack and his chums—"

"We don't mean that at all!" Edna said fiercely. "We mean— But you'll see what we mean, if you report us!"

Betty smiled.

"I'll take my chance about that," she said, and returned to her party, to find that Jack was going ahead with the ordering, with the jovial intention of still being the one to pay for all.

"Going to have tea now, Betty—you don't mind?" he remarked gaily. "The others say, 'yes'—all except Polly, and she won't say a word! Extra cream-bun for Polly, to help her to cheer up!"

"And for me, plis," requested Naomer artlessly. "Bekas, I don't know when I was so hungry! Eet must have been ze coach ride!"

Jack was signing to the waitress to come to his shoulder to receive a most varied order; and Polly, as Betty noticed, looked grimly disapproving.

A few moments later, scraps of talk going on at the Denver table reached Betty's ears, and it gave her a bad turn to realise that they seemed to bear a double meaning—seemed even to imply knowledge of the Steve Marshall—Jack Linton affair.

"Now, Bertie, no extravagance!" she overheard Fay jesting. "You haven't been backing a winner—ha, ha, ha!"

"Anyhow, I haven't been backing a loser either," he chuckled. "Mug's game, that!"

"And there are plenty of mugs about," grinned Edna. "I say, out of debt, out of danger! He, he, he!"

"Oh, but why?" Fay said flippantly. "If you lose, you can always promise to pay by a certain date, and they'll trust you?"

"I," laughed Edna, "should be afraid of not paying when I had the money! I might go on the bust—"

"With a debt hanging over you?" Fay said in a mock-scandalised tone.

"Why not?" her sister tittered. "Others do, it seems!"

Out of the corners of her eyes, Betty could see that these remarks were being made with many a significant glance at this table where Jack was of the party. She looked at him.

That he felt those loud remarks as being directed against him, was certain. Once, but once only, he glanced aside at Bertie Denver and the sisters. Then he set about cheerfully ignoring the obnoxious trio—and was that, Betty wondered, more of his recklessness?

"Gorselands," she heard Fay remark, a little later on. "That's the Marshalls' place, isn't it? What does Steve Marshall do with himself all day? Isn't he going out into business?"

"If you ask me, he is in business already," Bertie answered loudly. "A thriving one, too!"

He added something in an undertone which drew peals of laughter from Fay and Edna. Afterwards, they looked towards Jack again, in a highly amused way.

Betty, now, stole a glance at Polly. That poor girl was a study in ill-suppressed anxiety. The struggle which she had kept up, day after day of late, to appear unworried in front of her schoolmates, could no longer be carried on.

Anguish on account of the brother she loved so dearly, and who seemed to have gone all wrong, had almost overwhelmed her now.

"Not eating anything, Polly," that brother of hers remarked with genuine concern. "Come on, old girl; cheer up! What's it all about?"

"Nothing!" she disclaimed wretchedly. And then, wildly: "I can't help it; I'm wishing that you—"

"My hat, is that all that's wrong with you, really?" he gasped. "Miserable! just because I'm throwing my weight about! But I tell you—"

"You haven't told me," she protested half-tearfully. "And you know very well you'd be ashamed for me to know how you got the money!"

"Oh, that!" And his hearty laugh came again. "Ha, ha, ha!"

But he could not conjure a smile to any of the faces round about him, by being so mirthful himself. The spirits of all had now gone "phut."

Polly's chums could not see her in such genuine distress, and yet go on enjoying themselves. As for Dave, Jimmy, and Tubby, they looked uneasy.

"This won't do, Jack," said Dave gravely. "Gosh, I see it won't," was the sighed response.

"So we must scrap that original idea of ours, chaps. Pity! I'd prepared such a fine speech, Dave, in answer to the one you were going to make! But there," Jack grimaced, whilst dropping his voice a tone or two, "we couldn't have gone through with our little plan, in any case, I suppose—not with THEM at that other table!" He meant, of course, the Denvers.

"Plan?" jerked Polly, her brows raised high over eyes that had been tearful. "What do you mean, Jack?"

"Why, here it is," he said, with resumed levity. "Dave was to propose my health, et cetera, et cetera, during tea! And then I was to up and return thanks, and say—"

"But why?"

"Oh, just to top off with a bit of fun," Polly was blithely answered by her brother. "Sorry. It's a flop, that's all. Gosh, what a flop!" he sighed.

"What is the matter with him?" Polly asked Dave quite seriously.

"Nothing. He's his old self, so far as we know," was Dave's smiled response. "And you must, Polly—you must, you know, make allowance for his head being a bit turned, perhaps, by his winning so much money."

"Winning!" She echoed the word as if it were a hateful one. "And how DID he win—that's what he hasn't told us."

"No," Jack agreed cheerily. "That's what Dave was to tell you in his speech. But it's all off. We'll come again another day, and enjoy ourselves properly. Only, next time I take twenty-five pounds off a daily newspaper, as first prize in a footer competition, I'll just put every penny

of it in a money-box. And then, Polly, perhaps you'll be happy!"

He stirred his tea and drank. "Prize?" Polly gasped. "Footer comp—"

She got no further. Dave, Jimmy and Tubby—they were bursting into laughter.

"I shan't make my little speech," Dave said, after getting over his merriment. "But I will say, girls, it was a brainy competition, and Jack deserves full credit for pulling it off—against thousands of other entrants."

Jack stabbed a fork into a cream-bun, yanking it on to Polly's plate.

"So now, Polly—eat that, and be thankful!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Treating me as if I might have stolen the money," Jack jested grimly. "Or won it at cards or something! Jumping to conclusions like that—you know you were!" he said, wagging his head at her in half-serious reproach.

Betty could guess, then, what the words were that trembled at Polly's lips: "I had a reason, Jack—a reason for jumping to such conclusions!"

But Polly said nothing, and Jack was not one to go on waiting for an apology which seemed so slow in coming.

Another moment, and he was revelling in the demand from other girls for a full account of how he had won the competition. He embellished his narration with plenty of nonsense, and soon had them all laughing again.

In vain, however, Polly was watched for signs of a recovered jollity. It must have been the belief of all her chums but one that she was now feeling a bit ashamed of herself.

Only Betty could understand that cause for worry still remained. Even though the money had been honestly gained—there remained that debt to Steve Marshall—dishonestly incurred!

Meantime, the Denvers were making themselves very objectionable at their table. Fay and Edna started to smoke cigarettes, frequently whiffing the smoke towards Betty and Co., as if to say:

"Report that, too!"

They laughed, and there were further thinly-veiled references to "gambling debts," all of which angered Betty, even while she outwardly paid no attention. She would deal with the Denvers later!

It all hastened the rising of the chums and the Grangemore trio, Jack strolling to the pay-desk with the bill.

"Proper washout, boys," he sighed, when they had all left the café. "No more footer competitions for me. It isn't worth it!"

Rather wistfully his eyes sought Polly's, but she had nothing to say to him then. It fell to Betty to pair off with the moody girl during the subsequent saunter along the parade. The other girls were in great spirits again and had plenty to talk about.

And then suddenly Polly, walking a little way behind the chattering, with Betty, muttered fiercely:

"I'm going to let him know—that I know! I am, Betty—I can't stick this any longer! He doesn't realise that every time he makes a joke, I feel I could scream. Jack!" she called out to him. "I want you!"

He heeled round, stared back at her because of the sternness of her cry, then left the others, to come to her and Betty.

"Yes, Polly?"

"That was all right, Jack, about your winning the money in a newspaper competition. You had to use your brains, and getting the prize did you credit. But why," she asked tensely—"why didn't you use the money to pay Steve Marshall?"

BETTY saw Jack looking, for the moment, almost knocked out by the shock of Polly's point-blank question.

He stood dropped-jawed and goggle-eyed, as if she really had hit him—under the chin.

"Gosh!" he said at last. "You've known about that? You have found out, Polly? How—how?"

"Never mind how; that can wait. I've known for—oh, ages, it seems to me now; ages of worry and—and misery—"

"Polly! And you, Betty," Jack gasped, turning to her in a horrified way, "you've known, too?"

"Yes, I've known, too, Jack. I'm the only one who has shared the secret."

"What I would have done without Betty—to help me bear up!" Polly exclaimed throatily. "She knows, it has just about broken my heart to find I have a brother who has gone all wrong! Here you have been carrying on, all this afternoon, just as if you were the brother I used to be so proud of; talking as much nonsense as ever—"

"Did we all come out to be miserable, Polly? Hang it all, don't the others always expect me to demand a bit?"

"To me," she answered him bitterly, "it seems one of the worst signs of all—of the change in you—that you CAN still clown, with that hanging over your head! And, as I say, you haven't used the money to pay Steve Marshall!"

"No," Jack laughed queerly. "I haven't paid him, that's a fact. Haven't any intention, either, at present."

"What would the girls think of you if they heard you talking like that? If they knew that you'd been weak enough to get into that cad's clutches, by gambling, and having lost to him, you won't pay him when you could! It's being a waster, that's what it is! Not to care any more for—decency; to go after fellows like Steve Marshall, to become as bad as they are!"

"Now, stop!" Jack almost shouted. "You say another word, Polly, and—and I'll—"

"Steady," Betty quickly interposed, for he was clenching his hands. "It's your sister, Jack."

Then, deathly pale, he stared at Polly in a sunken-headed way.

"Yes, it's my sister," he said huskily. "Oh, I can't stand this!" came next moment in a wild, loud voice. "I won't speak to you again to-day, Polly. I'll clear out—go home by train. Good-bye, both of you! I'm going!"

He was striding away, even as he said it, and Betty could see him taking out the return tickets for the coach, with the evident intention of making them over to one of the other boys. He broke into a run to catch up with them and the rest of the party, now some distance ahead on the wide parade.

Then, when Betty was going to turn to Polly, she became enraged at the sight of Fay and Edna, approaching at a saunter.

Their cousin had left them, it seemed, to go into a tobacconist's on the other side of the sea road. Betty saw him hovering before the shop window; then she returned her eyes to the sisters, as they jauntily came within speaking distance.

"What do you want?" She had to speak like that, for they were grinning whilst Polly was in the depths of her misery.

"Only to ask you, Betty," Fay answered airily. "to let us in at the side door at half-past seven to-night."

"What?"

"We shan't be back till then," Fay smirked. "But there will be a coach from here that will get us to Moreove exactly at half-past seven."

"Either you'll get in at the proper time, with the rest of us," Betty said, "or you can expect to be expelled! I'm not going to take any orders from you—is it likely—about unlocking side doors?"

"Either you'll do as we ask—and as you easily can, you know," Fay retorted coolly, "or it will be the worse for Polly here."

"And you wouldn't like that, would you, Betty?" said Edna pertly.

"How do you mean?" Polly demanded fiercely. "Worse for me?"

"We really mean," Fay grinned, "worse for you and your brother! Betty has just been talking about expulsion—as if it were a terrible thing to happen to me and Edna, for being in after time. But expulsion would be worse for a fellow like Jack, we imagine—especially if it were for a thing like gambling! So, what about it?"

"Show them the letter, Fay," Edna suggested with a low laugh. "Just to convince them; it's not what we can say, but what we can prove!"

"In writing—yes," the elder sister said, backing a step or two as she drew a folded paper from her pocket. "From where you two girls are standing—you can recognise the handwriting, perhaps? I think that is your brother's hand, Polly?"

"So now," Edna jeered, "as Fay has said: What about it, Betty?"

"If that's a letter of Jack's—as it is," Polly pouted, "you've no right to it!"

"But we've got it!" laughed Fay, dancing a little farther backwards. "What's more, we mean to keep it."

The words were hardly past her lips when she found Betty darting at her.

Fay thought to evade the captain by flashing about and dashing off; but Betty overtook her—made a grab at her and held her.

"Edna!" Fay yelled, wanting to pass the letter to her sister. "Quick—Edna!"

But Polly had rushed upon that girl and was holding her fast. With Betty striving to snatch at the letter, all Fay could think of doing was to let it go from her hand, to be carried away by the wind.

In the instant that she released the sheet of paper, the strong breeze from off the sea whirled it away to the road. Betty let Fay go and darted after the letter as it fluttered and skipped along; but she was still barely overtaking it in its swift flight when she heard both sisters yelling to their prefect cousin.

Then Betty realised that he had come out of the tobacconist's shop, and, understanding the half-frantic appeals of the sisters, was rushing to get the letter himself.

It was blowing his way, and even as Betty sprinted harder than ever, she saw him make a final dash and snatch it up.

But Bertie Denver came erect, after that bit of lightning-like "fielding," to find one of his junior schoolmates charging towards him.

It was Jack, who had just started to go to the railway station when this dramatic business with the letter occurred.

Another moment, and Jack and the prefect were tussling on the opposite pavement.

They became locked together in a furious struggle. Fortunately, there were only the other schoolboys and the girls to witness this desperate set-to. They, of course, ran to the spot.

They were still running when they saw Bertie Denver almost succeed in casting off Jack. Then Jack must have made a supreme effort. In spite of his adversary being so much his superior in build and weight, Jack suddenly tipped him off his balance—threw him flat to ground.

It was an advantage by which Jack profited with lightning speed. He still grappled with the writhing senior, holding him down for a few seconds longer. Then Jack sprang away, and when he did so—he had the letter! He flourished it triumphantly, saying breathlessly, but gaily:

"O.K., boys! And now, I think, I'll change my mind about going home by train!"

CHAPTER 6.

"All Clear!"

LEAVING the prefect to pick himself up and receive the consolations of his Moreove cousins, the entire Study 12 party now hastened away along the quiet parade.

Betty was not surprised to see utter bewilderment in the looks of all her chums excepting Polly. What had Pam and Madge and all the rest of them known about the Steve Marshall affair? Nothing!

But they were likely to hear all about it now. Jack, retaining the captured letter, was wearing a smile which betokened coming explanations of a triumphant nature.

Nor had they gone very far along the parade, most of them in an astounded state, when he voiced a word or two that caused a general halt.

"Now, Polly-wolly!"

"Well?"

"From what you said, a few minutes ago, you have been imagining that I've become a waster? Getting into debt with the Marshall cad over gambling? Such things, Polly, coming from a sister—they hurt. You hurt me! That's why I was going home alone, by train. But now—"

"Oh!" she cried out distressfully. "Are you going to tell me that—that I—"

"I'm going to tell you that I have never owed Steve Marshall a single brass farthing, for gambling debts or anything else. I've never gambled with him."

"You haven't!"

"Never!" Jack flatly insisted. "And this letter that he has been holding over my head—it doesn't relate to any debt of mine to him. I didn't want it all to come out. I didn't even want my pals here to know. But it has got to be told now. The fact is, then, I found out that a certain fellow in our House at Grangemoor—shan't mention his name—had got into Marshall's clutches. A decent chap—scholarship boy, he is—but, like a silly ass, he didn't find out what a cad Marshall is, until it was too late. By that time he owed the brute a big sum which he could never hope to pay. Well, I got to know."

Betty took her eyes off Jack, to look at Polly. She was like one fascinated as she listened.

"I sent the scholarship fellow a note, telling him what an ass he'd been, and promising to help him out. That note he took to Marshall, to prove that the money would be paid in due course, and Marshall got hold of the letter and kept it."

"And that's the letter, in your hand now?" Polly said huskily.

Jack nodded, looking supremely happy.

"This is the very letter, boys! And now that it has come back to me, everything is O.K. You see, I went to Marshall to pay the debt as soon as my prize money came along. I really only went in for that comp, hoping to get some money

that way. But Marshall, when I met him, could not return the letter, and I was not going to pay him unless he did. I thought at the time he had either mislaid it or was pretending that he had. He took out his letter-wallet, and the note wasn't there, and he looked astonished. Now I know that he must have been genuinely surprised, finding that the letter had been stolen.

"Ah! Stolen by—by Bertie Denver?" Betty quickly inferred. "And Bertie had passed it to Fay, for her to use it as a hold over me! Fay and Edna reckoned that, whilst they held the letter, I would do anything they—"

"That's about it, boys!" Jack chuckled. "Only—the letter is no longer theirs, which I call a nice smack in the eye for them!"

He became serious again, looking at Polly. "I shall pay Steve Marshall, never you fear, Polly-wolly. He can have his money now. I'll have enough, even though I have disgusted you by throwing a party! But if you can't see that I'd have been a mug to pay Marshall without getting

"Not a bit of it!" Polly burst out. "I'm his sister! In any case, you only believed it against him, Betty, because I told you that it must be so! Oh, what a fool I've been! Look here, I'm going home—"

"Polly-wolly—"

"Don't, Jack—don't!" she gulped, trying to shake off his loving hand. "I'm so ashamed of myself! Up to a few minutes ago, I was so sure that you had taken to gambling, had become an utterly reckless waster! And instead, I find that you've been helping that other fellow at your school—the scholarship boy. You took his debt upon your—"

"Gosh, do shut up about all that, Polly," Jack wearily implored. "I don't want—we none of



It was a desperate race between Betty and Bertie Denver to snatch up the vital paper. If Bertie secured it, then it would be all up with Jack; but if Betty obtained it . . .

this letter back, then I hope others can see it, anyhow?"

"But, of course!" Polly cried out. "Oh, I quite see now—"

"You do, do you? Well," he grinned, "that's all right then. Would any lady or gentleman in the audience," he blandly inquired, "like to ask a question?"

"Yes, me! Bekas—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But, what ze diggings, I must be allowed!" shrielled Naomer. "Bekas, although I don't understand a bit what eet is all about, it looks as eef Polly owes Jack an apple-pology, doesn't it?"

"Apology?" Polly wailed. "What's the use of an apology? What can I ever say that will— Oh, I could kick myself! I could—"

"Well, don't!" Betty blithely interposed. "Jack, at any rate, will forgive you, Polly dear—as I hope he will forgive me! You've just as much right to be as sore with me, Jack—"

us want all this talk! It's wasting the afternoon! Come on, boys! Still an hour or two before the coach goes back, so why shouldn't we really enjoy ourselves, after all?"

"And go back to ze café, presently—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But, what ze diggings, we must celerbrate, mustn't we?" Naomer's shrill voice over-rote the laughter. "Gorjus idea, everybody! Jack stood us a treat in ze café just now. So, before we go back, we will stand him a treat—"

"And have those speeches after all!" Helen Craig suggested gaily. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Anything you like, boys, so long as we move on before a crowd gathers," Jack jested. "I'm only a waster, I know! But if Polly will take my arm— Wow!" he finished, in a collapsing way, as she suddenly rushed at him and hugged him about the shoulders. "Oh, boy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I know one thing I must do, at once," Betty said, when the merriment was subsiding. "Find

the Denver sisters and say just one thing at least. I can see them now, at the other end of the parade, so I'll—see you all, later!"

She ran off, having made signs that she wished none of her chums to accompany her. Fay and Edna had their prefect cousin with them as they sauntered in a direction likely to keep them out of the way of the Study 12 party. Nor was Betty surprised when, presently, her approach from behind caused the trio to turn round and glare resentfully.

Boldly Betty marched to within speaking distance.

"Fay—and you, Edna—I'm going to give you fair warning. Either you go back by the early coach—the one we are catching—or I shall report you both. I don't want to—"

"Oh, don't you!" sneered Fay. "Bossy!"

"You thought you had a hold over me by keeping that letter—"

"That's enough," Edna snapped. "Get out!"

"And we shall catch whichever coach we choose," the elder sister said defiantly. "Whether it gets us in late or not! Who cares!"

But Betty read that in the eyes of both girls which belied those words.

"I've warned you," she said—and turned away, to go running back to her chums.

She met them all where they were going down some stone steps to the beach. A strip of sand,

above high-water mark, offered a fine place for games—and Pam had produced a tennis ball.

"Rounders, Betty!"

"Good!"

"Just to get up an appetite for annuzzer tea!" was Naomer's joyous comment.

"What did Bertie Denver say, Betty?" she was eagerly asked.

"Bertie Denver? Nothing! You never saw a fellow, for his size, looking so small!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And Fay and Edna—what did they say?" asked Polly.

"They said they would catch whichever coach they pleased; but they won't," Betty confidently smiled. "They'll catch our coach, you see!"

Nor was that prediction falsified.

Fay and Edna caught the earlier coach—the one that would get them back to Morcove School at the proper time.

At the last moment for the start back, they came sneaking into the coach, seating themselves without a word to say to Betty and Co. and the boys. Fay and Edna wouldn't even look at them!

Which, to those same girls and boys, seemed another thing to laugh about, now that all was happily cleared up and Polly—sitting next to her brother—was really Madcap Polly again!

[END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.]

MYSTERY AT MORCOVE

But Mrs. Borgman did not wait, after all. Nor did she turn to walk away.

No one about!

She, too, had her daring—a thousand times greater daring than ever Fay and Edna would possess, for all they were the most wayward, reckless, lawless girls in the school.

The German "lady" waited, very much on the alert, until she saw the sisters start to run upstairs. Then, on tip-toe, she entered the Front Hall.

In spite of the thief-like stealth and quickness with which she had to act, her eyes darted a glance at the specimens of Tess Trelawney's work, pinned to the green-baize board. One covetous glance it was, and then—

She flitted aside into a dim passage—found a roomy cupboard that offered a hiding-place for the time being—darted into it—and drew the door shut without a sound.

An extract from one of the many tensely dramatic incidents that will thrill you when you read next Tuesday's vivid long complete story of the girls of Morcove School, by Marjorie Stanton—a powerful and unusual drama starring TESS TRELAWNEY, entitled:

BEGINS NEXT TUESDAY

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