

“MAUREEN'S 'CHINESE PUZZLE'”—Complete Story Within

The SCHOOLGIRLS' 2^D OWN

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Week ending
Sept. 21st, 1933
EVERY TUESDAY



POLLY MUST GET PAST!

An exciting incident
from this week's grand
long holiday story of
Betty Barton and Co.

Complete Fun-Story of DODO WREN Inside

Betty Barton & Co. Prefer to Remain Amidst Danger—Rather Than Desert One Who Needs Their Help Badly



From Turania in Triumph

A GRAND HOLIDAY-ADVENTURE
STORY OF THE MORCOVE CHUMS

By MARJORIE STANTON

Their Hazardous Task

"ONLY another hour to wait, at most!"

"That's all."

"And then—dark enough for us to make a move!"

"Yes!"

In guarded tones were these eager remarks exchanged.

And yet, to have seen the entire party to which the speakers belonged would have been to imagine that here were mere picnickers, rather the worse for wear after a long day in the wilds.

Seven girls and one adult, they sat making a meal that was scarcely picnic-fare. Some coarse, dark bread, broken into portions—not cut, because a knife did not exist amongst the party—and some black-looking, highly flavoured sausage; that was all!

Nor was any white cloth spread in this ferny spot, from which the sunset-glow was excluded by surrounding forest trees, massy with summer foliage.

No plates, no glasses for the reception of tasty, fizzing drinks! Betty Barton, in term-time a Form captain at Morcove School, was squatting here in the gloom of the forest, with her supper, so to speak, in her hands; and it was the same with six other Morcove girls and the lady who "presided."

The party was in the depths of one of those great forests which, with towering mountains and wide valleys, comprised most of the wild, lonely, and grandly romantic country of Turania; and Turania happened to be in the middle of a revolution, so that for Betty & Co., just lately, it had been one upset after another.

"Fwom pillah to post, geals—I think that just about expresses it!" sighed Paula Creel at this moment with a rather forlorn smile. "Bai Jove, when we do get back to our own country—what we will hev to tell them all!"

"When!" Polly emphasised the proviso. "And then it will be term again—classes, hockey—fine chance then to start writing a book about it all! And I would have liked to do that," she jested with a suitable sigh of baffled ambition.

"Anyway, we shall be able to talk about it all amongst ourselves in Study 12," Betty remarked consolingly.

"During one of those nice teas of ours!" Bunny Trevor rejoined lightly. "Pastries from the Barncombe Creamery—"

"Hi, stop it!" objected dusky Naomer, a remnant of sausage in one hand and bread in the other. "Bekas, no talking about cream buns and swess-roll at ze present, zank you!"

"Grumbling, are you?" madcap Polly playfully rounded upon the impish one. "When you had at least two inches more sausage than any of the rest of us!"

"And lucky to get anything at all to eat!" grinned Tess Trelawney. "I never knew such a lonely district! Betty and I seemed to be going on and on to the end of the world, when at last we found that woodman's cottage."

For even what Mrs. Zora Somerfield and the girls had to eat, at this moment, was only the result of a desperate foraging expedition.

Betty and Tess had been away two hours, trying to find some dwelling-place where food could be bought. The quest might not have been nearly so difficult and arduous, if the two girls had been free to make for a hamlet or village.

But there had been, and still was, the greatest need for secrecy. That was why only two of them had gone upon the errand.

Naomer bolted the last mouthful with a degree of satisfaction which disposed of any idea that she had failed to relish such frugal rations.

"And zere is one thing, any-old-how," she imperted hopefully. "We shall be all right for brekker in ze morning! Bekas over ze frontier by then!"

"Bai Jove, gweat welief when we are—yes, wather!"

"Well, we might have been over the frontier by now even," said Betty, "if we had cared to

leave Princess Sonia behind! Hands up those who wish we had!"

"Hands up those who are glad we didn't!" Polly counter-proposed; and up went all hands immediately.

Polly herself threw up both arms, so did Bunny Trevor. As for Naomer, she demonstrated such eagerness to poll with the rest that she flopped backwards and even became foot-in-air as well as waving two brown arms.

"Order!" the madcap requested mock-stermly. "Or you won't come with us to the castle!"

In all this there was a determined levity, a stoical fun-making in the face of danger, which brought again to the lovely face of Zora Somerfield an admiring smile.

"How wonderful you are, you girls!" she exclaimed softly. "Even if there had been nothing worse for you to endure than the march from my place at Klosters, to get to the frontier, it would have been enough to wear you out. But you have had also to see poor Princess Sonia, the refugee who was with us, taken away to Brancoviar Castle—"

"To be fetched back by us—during the night!" Betty caught the speaker up calmly. "No easy task, we know! But—it's what we made up our minds to do; it's why we have hung about, waiting for dark; and—we'll manage!"

"Hear, hear-r-r!" droned Bunny. "And, personally, I feel as fit as a fiddle!"

"After all," Madge Minden observed, with her usual placidity, "we have done a good deal of resting in the last few hours—except you, Betty, and Tess here."

"Too much resting for my liking," fumed ever-restless Polly. "I never knew it take so long to get dark! Even now—we haven't get a move on!"

"Oh, no," Zora Somerfield voiced gravely. "It would be still quite light up there where the castle stands high on the mountain-side, clear of the forest. The sky is clear, this evening, and—"

"Hark! Oh," Betty breathed tensely, whilst others looked their dismay at having heard a significant sound, "is that someone—coming?"

For a few moments they all sat perfectly mute and still, retaining most anxious expressions. Fatal to their desperate plan if somebody belonging to the castle should be straying this way—to find them here, when they were supposed to have gone on to the frontier and so out of strife-riven Turania!

Betty & Co. had let Zora Somerfield hear them quietly joking amongst themselves just now; but that, as she realised so well, did not imply a failure to appreciate the deadly gravity of the situation.

They knew! Events of the last four-and-twenty hours had made it tragically clear to them all that Princess Sonia, in flight from the Turanian capital of Suva Pesth, must either be got across the frontier or a terrible fate would be hers.

So what was causing this rustling sound from close at hand in the forest? Somebody prowling about? But in that case—who was it likely to be?

The country was all topsy-turvy on account of the revolution. Hostilities were not taking place actually in this district of Brancoviar-

which was only a few miles from the frontier. But the internal strife had rendered thousands homeless and panic-stricken. It might be only some other wanderer—a refugee, going in fear for his or her life.

The rustling continued—seemed to mean a gradual approach; yet Zora and the girls could not venture to move.

All were ruefully convinced it was too late to attempt a retirement. So many of them could not hope to steal away, without making a sound, when their feet must tread over dry twigs, pine-needles, and drifted dead leaves.

For a minute longer the awful suspense lasted, many of the girls wondering if the prowler might not be the very man who, some hours ago, had taken Princess Sonia from them.

Rupert Cosetti, whose enmity Zora Somerfield had incurred back in the past—he it was who had virtually arrested Sonia, as being a fleeing member of the ex-royal family. The Morcove girls—they had been nothing to him! They could "clear out"—so he had implied. But the princess was his lucky find, his capture—one to be sent back to Suva Pesth, there to be dealt with by the Black Sashes.

Suddenly there came a final and more violent disturbance of the dense undergrowth—within only a few yards of the girls.

Then, in the fast-fading light, they beheld a dark, ungainly shape of something living—a big brown bear!

The great creature had thrust himself clear of brambles and drooping foliage. In the gloom he looked all eyes and teeth as he paused—taking stock of Mrs. Somerfield and the juniors, whilst they could only stare at him, fascinated, horrified.

He growled at them—and Paula, for one, emitted a shuddering moan.

Although this seemed to give him pause, the others could not believe that any general going off into yells and screams would put him to rout. Besides, even now, they had to remember that a loud outcry might have fatal consequences in connection with Princess Sonia.



Hopefully the Morcove chums stared up at the brightly illumined square in the tower, outlined against the starry sky, then joyfully Polly whispered: "Look! There she is—!"

But, when the trying situation had lasted another half-minute, Bunny Trevor became so wrought-up that she suddenly voiced a frantic:

"Shoo! Geraway—shoo!"

Instantly, the whole party felt like going off into hysterical laughter. Bunny's cry—of the sort usually devoted to firesome geese on a common—had done the trick! Bruin had turned about and was gone.

"Whew!" Polly expressed her relief. "Did you ever!"

"Ow, yes—ow, gwacious!" Paula palpitated. "Oh, my goodness, geals—"

"Well, shut up, or you'll bring him back," fattered Bunny. "But what a country! Wild boars and bears, and Black Sashes, and bombs—we do have a time of it, no mistake!"

Some laughter of a rather strung-up kind was indulged in. Then came a reaction to such anxiety as their intended exploit was bound to mean.

There were to be no more of Bunny's flippancies at present. Any smiles during the next half-hour were simply due to delight at the unbroken stillness in the forest. Moreover was feeling that the moment had almost arrived for action to follow the lengthy wait.

And at last, by one whispered word from Zora Somerfield, she announced that that fateful moment had come.

"Now!"

It was almost groping dark down here in the valley, amongst the giant trees. No night breeze rustled the foliage. Strain their hearing as hard as they might, the girls could hear no sound from anywhere within miles.

What they did hear—but it was from a great distance away—was a fitful rumbling like thunder beyond the mountains.

Guns! Artillery in action, now that darkness had come again to war-torn Turania.

Betty and her chums were all standing up now with Zora Somerfield. The latter pointed the way they must all go—up a steep slope, with trees to creep between every yard of the way.

Boom, br-r-oom, boom! the guns spoke again, as if to leave Princess Sonia's would-be rescuers in no doubt of the deadly strife's continuance.

Presently one sound came from only a little way off in the night—the vibrant dong! dong! of a single deep-toned bell.

"Hear that, girls?" their companion whispered. "It is the bell at the Castle of Brancovar, striking the hour."

Night at the Castle

DONG! Dong! went the bell of the old stable-clock, up at the castle, until its iron tongue had proclaimed the hour.

Nine o'clock, and darkness all around.

Rupert Cosetti, alone in one of the great public rooms, finished the after-dinner drink which he had mixed for himself, then got up from an armchair.

Lighting a cigarette, he walked to the window and pushed one of the diamond-paned casements wider open, so as to see out all the better.

Mountain-tops had lost the last of the roseate light which had flushed them for a while after sunset. They were dark masses now, silhouetted against a cloudless sky that was like purple velvet, sewn with diamonds—the stars flashing brilliantly.

Elsewhere there was simply the blackness of night-bound forests which draped the mountain



Showing clearly against the yellow light of the tower window was the slender figure of a girl—Sonia, the captive princess.

slopes and lined the whole floor of that great valley above which lonely Brancovar reared itself.

Suddenly, Rupert Cosetti was aware of a shimmering light in the sky, like summer lightning. Gun-flashes! Afterwards there came the rumble of the distant explosions—and he grinned to himself as if the ominous booming only amused him.

But he felt uneasy. To-night's resumption of firing and bombing was not in accord with what he had been given to understand—that it had been a "walk over" for the Black Sashes and that already they had set up their own new government in Suva Pesh.

"Rupert, do you hear the firing!"

He turned round.

It was his sister Ettel who had entered.

"It's nothing," he shrugged. "There would be a few odd corners to clear up; some bunches of die-hards here and there who haven't the sense to know when their side is beaten."

"I do not like it," Ettel Cosetti complained querulously. "Do shut those windows, Rupert."

The room had been in darkness when she entered. She found matches and lighted an old-fashioned standard lamp.

"Suppose it means that the other side has rallied—has started to counter-attack? That sounds to me, at any rate, Rupert, like firing round Suva Pesh!"

"I don't care where it is," he peevishly answered. "The Black Sashes must have got the capital; must be having things mostly their own way. Or by now we would have had hundreds of them falling back in this direction."

He turned again to the window; peered and listened for a few moments, then closed one casement after another.

"Yes, Ettel, it must be so. The whole valley is as quiet as the grave, as it never would be, I'm positive, if things had taken a bad turn for the Black Sashes."

"Well, I hope you are right," she sighed.

"But you know what I think of the Black Sashes—a lot of scum!"

"They may be," he conceded with another shrug and a forced grin. "But that opinion of them, Eitel, is one we must keep to ourselves, now that they are in power."

"Say, rather, now that we, like Nicolai Brancovar, have declared ourselves to be on their side. As to their being in power—we don't know for certain yet!"

"Oh, that will do," he frowned. "I only went by Nicolai—as shrewd a man as can be found in all Turania. He has been certain that the Black Sashes would get in, and it was up to us—well, go with the times. Your nerves are in a bad state, Eitel, and you had better go to bed."

"Give me one of your cigarettes. You say, go to bed! You seem to forget that there is the Princess Sonia—"

"Oh, lock her in her room—good enough!" he burst out irritably. "That's one of the tower-rooms she is in, and the door has a lock as strong, I'll warrant, as any they'll put her behind when she gets to Suva Pesh."

"All the same I shall stay up," Eitel said, lighting her cigarette at the lamp. "I could not sleep to-night in any case. We seem—I don't know; unprotected—"

"What, here in the castle?"

"But there are scarcely any servants left. This place is all right when times are good and Nicolai Brancovar has plenty of guests for the shooting, and every night after dinner there is a dance. But to-night—what are we, you and I, but caretakers simply?"

"You would rather be in Suva Pesh?" he teased her. "But we have a guest—a royal one! I hope, by the way, she enjoyed the supper you took up to her?"

"I did not stay to see her eat it. I shall visit her again, of course, in a little while—"

"Then will you say I wish her a good night's rest? I don't suppose she wishes herself back in Suva Pesh! She soon will be, though you needn't remind her of that."

His sister was drifting away to the door, when he stepped quickly across to intercept her there.

"Pretty moody, aren't you to-night?" he protested curtly. "You do mean to work with me over this business of the princess?"

"Of course I do, Rupert! As good Black Sashes now, we must do our bit."

"Well, we must, and that's all there is to it," he frowned. "It's no time for being squeamish."

"I don't think I have ever been that, Rupert! Oh, no," she said with the family smile that was one of utter heartlessness; "our interests demand it, and that, as you say, is sufficient! To say nothing of your having caught the girl—when she was with Zora!"

He laughed fiercely.

"Yes! Two birds with one stone—eh, Eitel? We do ourselves a bit of good in the eyes of the new party by preventing the flight of the princess; and at the same time I get my revenge upon Zora!"

"I, also," his sister said. Her eyes were suddenly gleaming spitefully. "We Cosettis were not good for her—oh, no! She preferred that Englishman to you! That did not make her out to be a good Turanian; but at least it has helped to make me—just at present—a good Black Sash!"

"One of the few who are as beautiful as they are good—eh?" he lightly praised his sister, and was all smiles as he held the door open for her.

"I won't say good-night, Rupert. If I lie down

at all, it will be where there is only a locked door between me and the princess."

"Ja!" And his parting smile was one of approbation. "I shall take a lantern, Eitel, and go round the place."

She glided away, emerging upon a vast raftered hall, the walls of which were hung with trophies of the chase. A single candle was all that burned to-night in this hall, despite its baronial dimensions. All the domestic routine of the castle had broken down.

But there were other candles, in their antique holders, standing upon a side table, and Eitel, taking up one of these, lighted it and took it away with her.

There was no other light for her anywhere, as she mounted the wide staircase to the floor above, then struck aside into a lofty stone-walled passage. At the end of this she came to an arched doorway, serving stone steps that evidently wound their way, corkscrew fashion, inside a massive tower.

They must have been centuries old—the worn steps which Eitel Cosetti ascended, going round and round as she climbed higher. At intervals the fortress-like thickness of medieval walls was noticeable, where embrasures served slot-holes from which the primitive arrow, in its time, may have been loosed from its bowstring.

One of Eitel's delicate white hands kept the flame of the candle from flaring, and so the feeble light was sent more towards her face.

A lovely face, but hard! Like her brother, she was a soulless creature—had been the worst type of provincial aristocrat up till now, treating the peasantry as serfs. But, again like her brother, she was intending now to show "sympathy" for would-be reformers.

On the way up the tower steps she went over more than one stone-flagged little landing, where a closed door gave entrance to some cell-like chamber. The "arrested" princess, however, had been placed at the very top of the tower, and so it was to the last stone-landing of all that Eitel ultimately came.

Here she set down the candle upon the cold flags, then turned back the key in the lock of a very massive door.

"I have come to say good-night, Sonia."

The coldly spoken words caused the ill-fated refugee to look round with instinctive politeness, where she stood at the high and very narrow casement.

"Good-night, then," she answered calmly.

The room was in darkness. Princess Sonia saw Eitel Cosetti as a proudly erect figure just inside the doorway, silhouetted against the light that had been left outside. And Eitel, in return, saw the princess remaining at the window—such a young girl to be enduring so cruel an ordeal!

"You have everything you can want for the night—except a light?" Eitel remarked as coldly as before. "I will leave you the candle, then."

"Thank you."

"You had better try to sleep," Eitel advised, bringing in the candle. "Don't be frightened of being here; I mean, in this room, so high up. I know it has turned people's heads, at times, to look out of that window. I shall be close at hand all night," was added with a meaning smile.

"Oh, I am not frightened—of anything," Princess Sonia said, in a tone which implied courageous resignation. "I am well guarded, I know. That brother of yours—"

"Ah, don't be insolent!" Eitel fiercely interrupted, pausing on the way out. "My brother has the country to serve—a painful duty—"

"But, at worst, a duty involving little danger

to himself!" Sonia submitted. A dimpling cheek helped to stress the comment.

Ettel Cosetti turned again to the door and strode out to the landing. The unanswerable gibe about her brother's keeping aloof from all the strife had wounded her pride as a Cosetti. She pulled the heavy door shut so violently that it closed with a resounding boom!

Then the key turned, causing rusty hasps to rattle into their sockets. Youthful Sonia, ex-crown Princess of Turania, was locked in for the night.

She moved the candle to where it would be out of the way of any night-breeze which might waft in at the open casements.

That done, she went back to the little recess formed by the circular window-bay, and stood looking out into the starry night.

AT that moment, far below on the craggy, tree-studded mountain-side, a cautious creeping about by "Morcove" and Zora was taking place.

With the whole night before them, they felt sure it could be no waste of time, however vital each hour must be, to do some preliminary scouting.

Most of the girls knew the castle, having visited it during a previous holiday in Turania. Zora, before her marriage, had often stayed at Brancovar. So there was no lack of knowledge to-night as to how, for instance, the inaccessible-looking place was ordinarily got at.

Excepting Bunny Trevor, all these girls had, in those other days, climbed the appallingly steep approach-road—little better than a one-way track—which served the castle. But that normal approach was just the one they deemed it wise to avoid to-night.

If possible, they meant to find a means of entering at that side of the building where the rocky ground fell away steepest from the base of walls probably twelve feet thick.

The front of the castle, with its gated forecourt, could be of no service to them. There, it was certain, either Rupert himself or servants of his would have taken extra care to-night to render everything secure. But where the outer walls loomed above ground steep enough to be almost a protection in itself, less vigilance would, perhaps, have been exercised.

Suddenly they all heard the distant jarring and snapping of bolts. In the night-time hush of this high and lonely spot, it was a sound that came every now and then during the next few minutes. A couple of dogs, kennelled in some inner yard, barked furiously all the while those locking-up sounds continued. And Betty grimaced aside to those chums who were nearest to her, out here on the mountain-side.

"Got to reckon with dogs, girls!"



Polly handed out the weapons to her eagerly waiting chums. Morcove was certain that, with them, it could create the necessary diversion to enable Polly to get to the princess in safety.

"Yep," Polly whispered back. "They are—a nuisance!"

"Only thing," Tess muttered. "they may have been barking on and off the last night or two, hearing the guns."

"Yes, there's that," Madge murmured, a good deal relieved by this theory.

But now the dogs stopped their uneasy whoof-whoofing, those other sounds having ceased. A minute more the girls and Zora remained in dead-still attitudes; then they resumed the stealthy creepings.

The starlight helped them; even so, it was most difficult for the intending rescuers to crawl and clamber this way, that way up a slope so steep that a dislodged stone would go bounding downwards noisily.

Now and then those who led encountered a great boulder which looked so top-heavy that warnings were whispered back, and then it was writhed past with extreme caution. Bunny had to have her joke about what they were all at.

"Talk about storming the Heights of Abraham!" she tittered.

Suddenly the castle showed itself, towering above them still, from a new angle. They had so worked round, during a more or less zig-zag climb, that their steady progress had brought into view a corner tower.

With its conical roof and some jutting windows to an apartment just under that roof, the tower was a typical piece of the country's ancient

architecture—extremely picturesque as seen against the starry sky.

An added effect to-night was dim candlelight in the diamond-paned windows of just that one high-up chamber.

Almost it seemed to the girls as if a giant lantern were hanging to the outside of the tower-wall, such a striking projection had the window been given to secure wide views by day.

If only because it was the first light to be glimpsed, they kept upturned eyes upon that window fixedly.

A tower, and the top of a tower! Not without a little sinking of the heart was each friend of the captive princess realising that that lofty chamber might have become her prison for the night.

And then, of a sudden, they saw—a girlish figure standing at the window. Only so small and slender though it was, that figure with the light behind it was boldly revealed to them.

"Look—there she is!"

It was Polly who uttered that tense whisper.

Polly Investigates

"S H! Is it all right, still?"

"Yes!"

"Up there at the top of that tower," Betty whispered, still gazing with the others towards the lofty, dim-lit window. "Going to take some doing—even if we get inside!"

"At any rate, though," Polly softly exclaimed, "it has told us where she is. Once inside, we shall know where to make for."

"If only we could signal her from here!" was Midge's wistful whisper. "Can't we do that—attract her attention, somehow?"

"That's what I was thinking," Betty excitedly breathed, "when I asked if it's still safe for us—and it is! Mrs. Somerfield—shall we?"

"I think we must," Zora responded in a guarded tone. "For her to know that we are here—at least, hoping to rescue her—would be of such comfort. There are windows lower down—in the main part of the castle—but perhaps we can creep to where we would be out of sight to anyone watching?"

"Ah, she's gone!" several of the girls regretfully panted. "What a pity!"

"She may come back to the window, if we wait."

But, although this suggestion of Tess' was acted upon, nothing resulted, except that presently the window went dark. The captive princess had put out her light, so they could only infer that she had laid herself down to get some sleep.

Often enough did they send eager glances to that lofty window during the next half-hour, for they were keeping to the slope below that side of the castle. Yet nothing happened to induce their making a signal.

There was, however, another window which at last claimed their interest.

This was one at ground level, and for that reason it had been provided with protecting bars. But the iron bars had nothing to do with the antiquity of the place. Their purpose was to prevent any burglarious attempt, the window fronting on to the ground that was not walled in.

Zora whispered to the girls that she believed it to be a still-room window, and so very likely no glass was behind the bars, but only perforated zinc, to supply constant ventilation. She feared, however, that one of the bars would have to be removed before an entry could be obtained, and she did not see how that could be done with sufficient secrecy.

"The bars are bound to be spaced apart so as

not to let anyone squeeze through," she deplored.

"A full-grown person—perhaps not," Betty whispered back. "But how about one of us girls? Here, let Polly and me creep to the window to find out if anything can be done, whilst you others wait!"

"Very well, do that!"

So, whilst the others kept to the lurking place on the rugged slope, Betty and Polly snaked uphill amongst the sheltering boulders and stunted bushes.

On all fours they crawled close in under the towering castle wall—got to the very base of it, with that barred window directly above their crouching forms.

To their dismay, it was not nearly as close to the ground as they had calculated. Even when they came erect, the stone sill was well above their heads, so that they could not reach their hands to the bars.

Had they been able to do that, both girls would soon have been drawing themselves up to the sill.

"Oh, but we know what to do," came Polly's impatient grappling with the obstacle of height. "You give me a bunk up, Betty—come on!"

"Zora was right; there's no glass behind the bars," Betty joyfully whispered. "So we really ought to manage."

"I'm not going back now!" Polly stated fiercely.

Betty, no less determined, set a back for Polly, who quickly clambered up and grasped the bars. Another moment the madcap had drawn herself on to the sill.

"Wire netting behind," she whispered down.

She first put a hand in between two of the bars to feel what resistance the netting offered.

Then Betty heard her chum dragging the wire netting away from some of the nails that secured it.

"Easy!" came Polly's breathless report, after a minute of cautious activity. "That's that, Betty. I don't know if I can squeeze through. Going to try. If my head sticks—well!"

"But look here, dear; let me come up," clamoured Betty softly. "You reach down and—"

"Just a sec!"

It was like Polly to be already striving to squeeze through. Her usual intolerance of obstacles made her want to prove quickly that the thing could be done; then she would writhe back again to help Betty up to the sill, so that they could both go through.

But the squeezing through proved so difficult that Polly, when at last she was inside, felt sure that she had better not go back. Indeed, she wondered if it would be even possible for her to get back. It had been such a tight squeeze, she had a sense of being swollen-headed by the exertion. There had been one desperate moment when her head had stuck fast, and it had seemed to swell then—between the bars!

For good or ill, she whispered out to Betty still to wait.

Then—the only one of them all to have made her way into the castle—Morcove's madcap prowled away into the deep darkness that was behind the window.

On tiptoe she went, putting her hands alternately outwards and sideways in groping motions, so as not to brush against or blunder into anything.

The chamber she was in, with its cold stone floor, reeked like a chandler's shop. Zora had been right; this was a cool store-place for all those pickles, jams, and other commodities which foreigners keep by them in such great quantities.

By the time she had found her way to the door, Polly's eyes were growing accustomed to the darkness. In any case, she would never have stumbled over the few stone steps which she encountered at the doorway. Shrewdly she had reasoned that this storeplace was half-cellar, below the level of the domestic regions with which it would be connected, although above ground.

The door, to her immense relief, opened with her cautious lifting of a wooden latch. She crept forwards, and warmer air was upon her cheeks. Kitchens, just here?

Yes, and there was the kitchen fire on the verge of dying out. After the black darkness of the store-room, she could see much better here. There was great disorder, her peering eyes noticed, and from this she astutely inferred that the castle's domestic arrangements were all-anything, owing to the revolution.

Out of the kitchen, along a dark and wide passage she stole.

Tremendous, stout-walled stronghold that the castle was—and yet she was actually inside it. And whether its inmates to-night were few or many—none yet had heard a sound, for not a sound had she made.

It was a degree of success which impelled her to go on alone. After all, she excitably reasoned, it was simply a case of finding the way up to that tower-room, of unlocking the door and silently rousing the princess, and then—they could creep down together.

It occurred to Polly that she ought to render it possible for all her friends to enter en masse, as it were, should anything necessitate a cry to them for help. Also, an outer door should be unbolted and left ajar by her, so that she and the princess could, if all had gone well up till then, get away all the quicker.

Vague recollections of the castle's vast interior helped her now. She tiptoed into one grand entertaining-room where there were great french windows, offering views uninterrupted by outlying buildings or wall.

She and the princess could go out by these windows, and would then have only some ornamental railings to clamber over, at the foot of the terrace, and they would be altogether clear of the place—free!

On the other hand, Zora and the rest could rush in by these french windows, if the need should arise.

"But I hope it won't!" Polly grimaced to herself. "If it is to come to a rough-and-tumble for the lot of us, then we shall have our work cut out! I must let them know, though, about these windows."

This meant creeping back to the barred window, for some whispering out to Betty, and Polly felt suddenly impelled to do a bit more "scouting" before reporting. She would at least find her way to the tower staircase, and so, perhaps, obtain a good idea as to whether or not she alone could "do the trick."

How long it was after this she did not know; perhaps no more than five minutes, perhaps it had become a quarter of an hour—she had tiptoed the wrong way more than once, after all, and had to turn back. But at last she was on a first-floor landing, stealing towards a likely-looking corridor, when she realised that there was a light burning.

Rich carpeting helped her to avoid making the slightest sound as she went a few steps farther.

Then she could peer round the corner into that dimly lighted passage, and what she saw caused her heart to sink.

At the far end a lantern was burning, and its

light showed her a couch that had been dragged from one of the rooms to rest close in front of a doorway giving access to the tower stairs. And there on the couch lay someone at rest—Ettel Cosetti!

—
"Stalled!"

THAT it was Rupert Cosetti's sister, Polly was instantly certain. The clothes of that reclining woman were too grand to be those of a servant.

Asleep? Whether sleeping or waking, the woman thus positioned for the night was a terrible obstacle. Polly's mind was now in that raging state which a hitch for her always meant.

"What on earth am I to do now!" But Ettel Cosetti was not asleep, although her eyes had been momentarily closed. Still peering, Polly saw the self-appointed "gaoleress" make a restless movement, then sit up to light a cigarette.

Her lying back again, to whiff at the cigarette whilst her head lolled amongst heaped cushions—it was all suggestive of a luxury-loving nature. It also suggested that this fair creature meant to keep awake, however boring the vigil might be.

If only Ettel Cosetti had resorted to some other means—retired to some room close to the princess' in the tower, even shared Sonia's own room! Anything, Polly felt, would have been better than this barring the way into the tower itself. Lying awake, and with a lantern burning—so that there could be no hope of creeping upon her unawares. Maddening, all this!

Forced to withdraw, Polly found herself downstairs again, yet hating the idea of returning to where she could communicate with her friends.

She had hoped to be able to go back and let them know exactly how the rescue could be achieved. "And now I don't see how it is to be done—I just don't!"

Prowling about downstairs, Polly suddenly came upon a gun-room. As she had conjectured, here were plenty of sporting guns, with stocks of cartridges in a drawer.

As she filled a frock pocket with some of these cartridges, and then took up two of the guns, her smile to herself in the darkness was that of a girl who could see triumph coming—victory in sight, after all.

"Betty! Here—take these!" That was the madcap's tense whisper, when next minute she was back at the barred window of the store-room.

But Betty was not the only friend, immediately below the window, whom Polly could see as she passed one of the shotguns between the bars.

Zora and all the others had crept up close to where, originally, only Betty had waited.

The gun, carefully lowered by the barrel, was taken from Polly's grasp. She passed out the other, the same way.

"Cartridges," she then voiced softly, starting to set them out on the stone sill. "Get hold of these, one of you. I'm going back for more guns."

"But, Polly—"
"Don't argue. I've thought it all out," she whispered to her considerably amazed and excited chums; "you'll have to stage a night attack on the place—then I'll do the rest. It's all right—I'll explain more fully when I get back in a couple of minutes. We must have more guns than that."

In vain they gestured to her to explain further before going away again. She vanished, leaving

them open-mouthed with wonderment, their eyes staring up to the barred window at which she had appeared for only those few moments.

Zora took possession of one of the guns, permitting Betty to retain the other. Then Madge, by hoisting Tess up, enabled that chum to collect all the cartridges from the sill.

"I think I get her idea," Tess excitedly whispered when she was on the ground again. "Polly reckons that she can get to the princess, and bring her away, if we create a sudden racket."

"A diversion, drawing the Cosettis and any servants to a part of the castle away from the tower?" Zora rejoined, speaking under her breath. "But what about the risks that Polly is going to take alone? We must—"

"Hark! Here she is again!"

Betty had barely whispered the belief when Polly's face was once more discernible—like a white mask in the darkness, obtruding between two of the bars.

"Listen, all," she spoke down to them, in the lowest of undertones: "I've got four more shot-guns for you and another lot of cartridges. What you must do: work round more to the front of the castle, and then let off all the guns together. The Cosettis won't be thinking of us; they'll imagine it something to do with the revolution. Leave the rest to me."

"Oh, but Polly!" Zora gasped. "My dear girl, I must know—"

"It's all right I tell you," Polly interrupted that demurring voice; and Betty and the rest could see her smiling. "But if I don't turn up—if anything does go wrong and you hear me shouting—then there's a french window opening on to the terrace; it's open now, so that will let you in. 'Bye for now!"

"Wait, though! Polly—"

"Oh, in case you didn't quite get my idea," she again checked Zora; "try to let some of the shots smash a few windows. As much row as possible—that's the idea."

"But not the french windows?" Bunny blandly inquired.

"Gracious, no! I come out by those windows—with Sonia. That is, if I get her!"

If!

There was Polly's merry look as she passed the second lot of shotguns out to her chums, to imply that the element of uncertainty was nothing for them to worry about. But Betty was not the only one to realise what a very big IF it was!

DING, dong, the old clock at the stables sounded again in the darkness and the stillness of this fateful night.

This time it was the quarter-past the hour which the brief chime proclaimed; and Ettel Cosetti, stubbing out a finished cigarette, yawned heavily.

Then she heaved a big sigh of boredom. This was going to be one of the most trying nights she had ever experienced. Tired, after much broken sleep the night before, yet she could not have got to sleep now even if she had been free to try to do so.

To her, the revolution was a "sickening business," threatening to hash up her whole future. Even if she and Rupert became no poorer by it, life would never be the same again for either of them.

No more living in idleness and luxury, dividing the year between gala times in Suva Pesth and sport and flirtations in the country. She would never make a great marriage now. There would be nobody "great" to marry. Rotten!

Yet whilst she pitied herself on account of the

revolution, because it threatened to end her existence as a social butterfly, she had not a pitying thought for the princess, to whom the great change-over was likely to mean life imprisonment—or even death.

Since the country was "going Black Sash," Rupert had done right in preventing Princess Sonia from being smuggled over the frontier by Zora; that was Ettel's completely callous opinion. At a time like this, one had got to be Black Sash—outwardly, at any rate. The revolution would end, and then there would be the challenging question: What did YOU do to help us establish the new order of things?" Not bad, if Rupert could proudly answer: "I? I placed the Princess Sonia in your hands! But for me she would have escaped over the frontier, to live and so be a cause of perpetual unrest. The last of the royal line, and therefore a danger to you—and that danger I prevented."

"All the same, I hate having her to look after," ran Ettel's dejected thoughts. "Only a little after ten, and I've got to stick here until daylight, without getting a wink of sleep. Rupert thought it good enough if I merely locked her in; but I am not so sure. Never trust servants! I believe we have one or two about the place to-night who would be glad to find in the morning that she has escaped. That's the sloppy sentiment you get—in servants."

She smiled to herself disdainfully.

"They expect to have revolutions and yet still keep the royal family. Fools! They'd like it to be all done without anybody getting hurt."

Then she laughed feebly, mirthlessly. At any rate, if some stupid country girl—a domestic about the place—did take it into her head to see if Princess Sonia could be set free during the night—that girl would find herself nicely "stalled!"

"But fancy," Ettel murmured disgustedly, "having to stay up—for the servants! When they used to have to stay up for me—until past three in the morning when there was a ball. Oh, well, as Rupert says, we must change with the times."

And, lighting a fresh cigarette, she coiled down again—a wakeful, vigilant sentinel, guarding the only approach to the tower.

Night Attack!

BANG! And instantly afterwards, like a volley of rifle-fire—bang, bang, bang!

Ettel Cosetti sat up sharply, crying out startledly. The cigarette dropped from her nerveless hand.

"Mother of heaven," she palpitated. "What is all that firing! Oh—"

Bang, again—bang, bang! Bang, bang—BANG!

Wild-eyed with terror, she got up from the couch and stood for a moment swaying as if hardly able to stand. Then she sat down again, panting for breath.

The gunshots had caused a loud and ugly smashing of glass. There was a tinkling and crashing somewhere in the castle.

"It is an attack—must be!" she panted, pressing a hand over her leaping heart. "Oh, where is Rupert? We shall all be killed. They are not Black Sashes who are storming the place. If they are, then there is some mistake! Rupert!" she began to scream for her brother as she rushed up the passage leading to the main staircase.

"Rupert, Rupert! Come quickly—Rupert!"

Bang! Boom, bang!—more crashing noises—and still another deafening BANG!

At the staircase-landing Ettel stood still, utterly panic-stricken. Her brother came out of his room, which was served by a corridor running towards that side of the castle where the firing was taking place. He was in dressing-gown and slippers, and he carried a switched-on pocket-torch.

His wild waving of the torch evidenced great agitation.

"Rupert!" she moaned, rushing to clutch one of his arms. "What does it mean?"

"How should I know?" he raved. "Soldiers? I don't know! They are storming the place, anyhow—"

"Yes, it's dreadful! Oh, and listen to the servants, screaming and shouting—the cowards!" Ettel quavered. Then she burst into tears.

"Rupert, what do we do? Save me!"

"Well, come on, then!" he gasped, hardly waiting for her as he went rushing downstairs. "Safest place—the cellars!"

black darkness of a back-lobby giving access to the wine cellars.

Then Polly flashed from her hiding-place and ran up the main staircase, three steps at a time.

She was aware of sounds of panic coming from a high, remote part of the castle—the servants' quarters. Her hope was that they would not rush down in this direction, as they would have some secondary staircase offering a descent more removed from the scene of the "attack."

In any case, she had to take a chance now. Now that the great manœuvre had succeeded in stampeding Rupert and Ettel to the cellars.

Darting into the first-floor corridor, at the end of which Ettel had placed her couch for the night, Polly in five seconds was dragging the couch clear of the doorway to the tower.

Then she had the winding stone stairway to climb; round and round as she went higher and higher, a corkscrewing ascent that might have



The makeshift "bridge" shook and rocked with the force of the rushing torrent as the Morcove party crossed it. If it turned they would be flung into the foaming waters, but it was the only way of escape with the princess.

"Can't you—can't you go out to them, Rupert? Get them to stop? Oh, do—do!" she frantically implored, dashing after him down the stairs. "Tell them—whatever they are, we are on their side!"

"Don't be a fool!"

Bang!

"Oh, they're inside now! Rupert—"

"Come on, I tell you!"

"Wait for me! Rupert, shine the torch! Rupert, wait for me!"

POLLY, peeping round the edge of a carved screen in the richly furnished hall, watched the terror-stricken pair as they frantically raced away from the foot of the grand staircase in flight for the cellars.

She saw Rupert Cosetti catch his foot in a trailing cord of his dressing-gown and fall headlong. He struggled up instantly, but the torch had slipped from his hand and smashed itself upon the floor. He and Ettel rushed on again, into the

dizzied her, but she had no time to feel any effects.

To her great joy she heard more firing just as she came, a-gasp for breath after the hasty climb, to a top stone landing, with a door which she felt positive was THE door!

The key was in the lock. She turned it back, threw the door wide round before her, and was instantly confronted with Sonia, fully dressed.

"Here, come on!" Polly panted. "Out of this—quick, whilst there is a chance. The others—they'll be waiting. I'll take you to them."

There was no time for more. They ran down the winding stairway together. At the foot of it, just as they darted out by the doorway where Ettel had had her couch, Polly took Sonia by the hand.

They raced along the corridor, and then went helter-skelter down two flights of the main staircase to the hall. No one was about; but they heard the servants jabbering not far off, and also the nervous voices of Ettel and Rupert.

Now that the "firing" had ceased, Rupert by his loud remarks appeared to be feeling "bold"!

Polly pulled Sonia after her into the room with the french windows, which stood open in readiness. A few moments more and both girls were outside, nipping to ornamental railings which were all that separated the terrace garden from the wild of the mountain-side.

They clambered over the railings, and then, whilst they made the easy descent of a part of the steep ground, Polly contrived—much out of breath though she was—to give a faint whistle.

After the darkness of the castle, the starlight about here seemed to make the summer night quite bright.

"Where they are!" Polly suddenly panted. "Whoopee! You all right for keeping on, Sonia? Want any help?"

"Ah," said Princess Sonia, speaking for the first time since her prison-door was unlocked to her, "I think you have helped me sufficiently, don't you?"

"No," Polly laughed. "Time to say that—when you're over the frontier!"

A Last Thrust

ONCE again were rescuers and rescued alike to hear the bell at the Castle of Brancovar—as the very faintest ding-donging—whilst they hastened on in a reunited party.

The forest was all about them again, and they seemed only to come upon a helpful track at one moment, to find it giving out a minute or so later.

Mostly they were simply floundering along through hampering undergrowth, their clothes getting torn to shreds by the brambles. But at least they were keeping in the right direction—straight as the crow would fly—for the frontier.

Never too dense were the trees that they could not keep to the desired course by managing to glimpse the stars.

A pursuit—had one been started? They did not know; but it was certain that, ere this, Rupert and his sister must have discovered how they had been fooled. That he was a born coward did not mean, either, that he would be disinclined to pursue them.

He had his horse, and it would require no courage to set off, armed, to overtake fugitives who were quite defenceless, and not a man amongst them.

Zora, for a little while, had retained her gun, with just one saved cartridge. She had declared passionately that, if he came after them, she would shoot him. But the gun had been too heavy for her to go on with, if she was to keep up with her young companions, and so she had reluctantly cast it away.

"And now—look! The river!"

Not surprising, that half-reeful utterance of Polly's. To all of them, in their desperate flight, it was causing mixed feelings—their having found the river again.

The sight of it once more, now that they had suddenly emerged upon a clearing which took in part of the river-bank, meant a joyful certainty of their having come far and come aright. But that joy was tinged with the dismaying knowledge of what a difficult, even disastrous, barrier the rushing river might prove to be.

Cross it they must, if they were to continue in the only direction in which safety lay. Previously, however, they had been quite baffled, held up by the river. A certain bridge—the only one for miles in both directions, as Zora had told them—was blown up.

Before, they had been unable to find any fording-place, and swimming was out of the question. This was a rushing river, foaming and eddying, fed by mountain torrents that were ice-cold.

The strongest swimmer, after choosing an apparently safe part, would yet be swept away, smitten with cramp, knocked senseless amongst boulders, or fatally caught in a dreadful whirlpool.

What, then, were they now to do?

It was simply their inability to get across, less than twelve hours ago, that had resulted in Sonia's being "arrested" by Rupert Cosetti. Was there to be that dire catastrophe all over again?

"Sickening nuisance!" Polly was soon raging aloud to Betty and others. "When it's really not a wide river, after all!"

"Only so swift and deadly," Betty glumly rejoined. "Mrs. Somerfield won't even consider our trying to swim it."

"You can't hear any noise of a cataract," Tess muttered, whilst they scurried along a section of the bank that was new to them. "Or we might hope to be getting to some fording-place at last. If only we could find a patch of rocks—"

"Where we could jump from one to another—yes," Bunny put in. "We wouldn't be slow about the jumping!"

"I say, though!"

This was Betty, suddenly stopping dead as if an idea had seized her.

"Girls! Can't we make our own bridge, somehow? Oh, I know we haven't an axe or a chopper—we've nothing, or we might have felled a tree. But—"

"You're thinking—look for a fallen tree!" Polly burst out. "But, come to that—we passed one just now!"

"Why, yes!" several of them cried. "Lying close to the water, too!"

"Oh, come on back!"

The thrilling idea of making use of that fallen tree was quickly made known to the others following behind, and then the return rush was made by all.

Some of the Morocove girls galloped back, as if the hope of being able to bridge the river had given them new life.

The tree, when they got to it, proved to be a giant larch—one of thousands that draped the slopes of the great valley.

Some felling of neighbouring trees, close to the river so that they could be floated away by the timber-cutters, had left this tree, no doubt, exposed to stresses of weather which it was not fit to endure. A gale had laid it low, causing it to lie a-sprawl across the clearing.

Desperately the girls and Sonia brought their united strength to bear upon the tree; but they did no good until they resorted to leverage. Branches lopped from other trees, and left behind as waste by the timber men, served splendidly, and soon the huge stem was being shifted, first by one end and then the other, until it was at the water's edge.

Then came the awkward and terribly anxious work of levering it outwards, by one end only, to take to the water.

There was an unvoiced thought in the minds of them all of what failure was going to mean. So much delay, all for nothing. And even now Rupert might be on horseback, trailing them; finding it easy to follow the track which their own trappings and flounderings had left during the flight from Brancovar.

Suddenly:

"Loo-oo-ook out, girls!"

Betty could see that the current had taken hold of the prone tree at last. By that end which they had been levering outwards into the water, it was floating away.

Pivoting on the end which still rested upon the bank, it swung nearly all its length in the river.

Was it long enough to reach from bank to bank? They could not be sure; only wonder and watch, heart in mouth. Unless that outer end, swinging with the current, hit the opposite bank—they would have failed!

The water began to surge and spume. It was as if the river were working itself into a rage over the impending obstruction. The floating mast floundered wildly before the watchers' anxious eyes. They saw it lodge before it was far from being in a bank-to-bank position, and some of the girls gave groaning shouts:

"It's stuck! It won't move again!"

But it did move, when the impeded river had taken only a few moments to rise higher, lifting the very impediment as it did so.

There came a sudden, louder wallowing of the water and a crackling of branch-stumps. Afloat again, the tree was swirled on, and then—

"Hurrah!" Naomer was the first to shout, whilst starting to clap her hands and caper. "Bekas—look!"

The outer end had lodged against the opposite bank, and there was Morcove's way across—at last!

"Sonia!" the joyous girls turned to cry to her. "Come on, then—hurrah!"

"Yes, go on, all of you, but, oh—take care!" Zora implored. "Don't fall in!"

"We shan't do that!" Bunny gaily responded,

"One more river,
One more river to cross!"

One behind the other, out stepped the girls on to the makeshift bridge, with the racing water liable to rise just the inch higher which would mean, perhaps, a sudden and disastrous dislodgment.

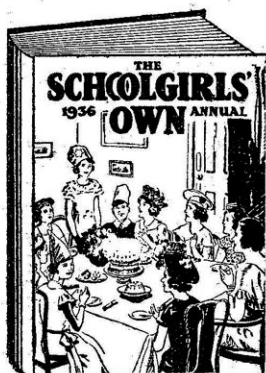
Paula, when her turn came, was all nervous squealings. She had to crawl on hands and knees, and, even so, Madge had to keep a steady hand upon her.

Fearful experience it was, indeed, to be in mid-stream on a "bridge" which rocked as one walked it, and the river, in its half-checked state, swirling, foaming—rising rapidly!

But Betty, with her own private reason for wanting to be last across, except for Zora, saw her chums and the princess all getting safely to the other side. Betty's motive for hanging back was the same as Zora's: if any of the others slipped, then she meant to be the first to plunge in to attempt a rescue!

"Now, Betty—go on, dear, and I'll follow."

(Continued on the next page.)



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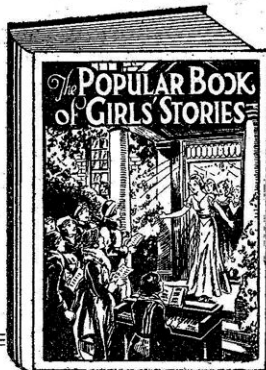
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"All right, then!" Betty was responding blithely, when she saw Zora's eyes in the starlight send a dilating look over a shoulder.

"Ah, I hear someone now," Zora exclaimed tensely. "Someone on horseback! Betty, quick—quick!"

Betty took the makeshift bridge at a rush, and was across. Another moment and Zora also was there, on the other bank, with the rest of the party.

In that moment they saw mounted Rupert gallop his horse clear of the trees.

He saw them, and he saw by what means they had crossed the river. Down from his saddle he flung the reins over the horse's sweating neck, then came striding to the "bridge."

Morcove, with Sonia and Zora, started to run. Looking behind, they could see him stepping out on to the tree that spanned the river.

Nor had he come after them unarmed. His flourishing arms, as he kept his balance whilst crossing over, enabled them to see a revolver in his right hand.

But Rupert Cosetti never reached that other side.

Suddenly there was that booming sound again from the river, and they saw the tree-trunk cast about by the raging waters, so that instantly the man himself was gone from sight; gone down into the furious flood, perhaps to perish there!

Morcove Gives a Cheer!

"GOOD-MORNING! Can you give us some breakfast?"

Zora Somerfield, speaking the language of the place, had wanly smiled the question now that the front door of the best hotel in Bukajero had been opened to her and her eight weary, tattered juniors.

It was only a little after dawn, but Bukajero was astir. All Bukajero was up, for the simple reason that it had stayed up—all night!

So here at last were Betty Barton and her chums of Study 12 at Morcove School, safely over the frontier, with Mrs. Somerfield—and the princess!

Dead beat, their clothes in rags; but—their objective was achieved. Sonia was saved!

Officials, a few minutes since, had given very little trouble. The frontier was supposed to be closed, but humane instructions had been given to let in women and children who were refugees from that neighbouring state which was in the throes of its revolution.

Suddenly, however, Mrs. Somerfield turned to the juniors with words that took revivifying effect.

"Girls! I am told that Judy and Pam and Helen slept here the other night! They had to wait for one of the continental expresses."

"Oh!"

"And before they went off in the morning they had a telegram from England—answering one they had sent. So that ended all Judy's anxiety about her mother. Judy knew, before she boarded the train, that her mother was out of danger—getting better."

"Splendid!" Morcove rather croaked, its voice being affected by physical exhaustion.

In they went, all of them, to become greatly refreshed by those ablutions which preceded coffee and rolls and great cuts of ham, and sections of tasty sausage and confiture and fruit. But there is a weariness of mind and body which only sleep

can really end, and that sleep they were soon enjoying.

The day drew on, and became hot and noisy, with much shrieking of engine whistles at the station hard by; but Betty, her chums, the princess, and Zora—they slept through it all.

Not until the afternoon sun was beating upon the closed jalousies did one pair of pretty eyes after another come open.

Then Sonia sat up, coming in for a merry "Morning!" from one of the chums, and "Afternoon!" from others, and "Evening!" from Bunny—in case it should be even as late as that.

Mrs. Somerfield was not here, although she had shared the room with her charges. A minute later, however, when the girls were doing their best to make themselves what Paula called "presentable," Zora rushed in, her lovely face proclaiming more good news.

"Girls—it's over!"

"Eh, what?"

"The revolution! I have this moment heard. Suva Pesh broadcast at midday: 'Peace!'"

"Hurrah!" Betty & Co. went off into one of their full-throated Morcove cheers. "Sonia, do you hear this? Peace!"

"But who," Madge clamoured, "is in power?"

"Not the Black Sashes!" Zora smiled. "It is a Government of the best men from all parties. And nothing could be better for my country than that! No extremes, no persecution—"

She was going to say more, but broke off, struck by a strange look in the eyes of the ex-princess. Betty & Co. had noticed it, and were waiting for her to speak.

It meant deep silence for a little while. Sonia, going across to the windows, pushed open one of the jalousies so as to be able to see out. Those who watched her, as she stood there, noticed that hers was a far-away gaze.

At last she turned round and spoke—very calmly and prettily:

"You will let me go back—at once?"

"Sonia!" she gasped. "Oh, but—"

"Please," she entreated, "I must go back at once—to Suva, yes. It does not mean that you have not done me a great service. You saved my life—I shall always believe it was so—and in my prayers I shall always ask a blessing for you all."

Her voice became emotional.

"It is peace now, but it was war then—when you were standing by me. Peace now—and so I would like to turn back."

"Yet, why?" Polly exclaimed uneasily.

"Sonia—why?"

"I shall tell you why," was the smiled answer. "For the same reason that you turned back—for me. Because there are times when one hears—a call. You understand, I think?"

OFTEN it fell to Betty, as a Morcove captain, to speak or act for others.

So now, in suddenly stepping to Sonia and kissing her, Betty was not merely expressing her own mute admiration; she was also conveying what was in the minds of all her chums.

For she and they alike did understand what Sonia had meant—being built that way, themselves!

[THE END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.]

"DISGRACED by the Denvers" (by Marjorie Stanton)—first of a magnificent new series of Morcove "Back-at-School" Stories—appears in next Tuesday's SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN.

"Fire! Fire!" The Dread Cry Rings Through Grangemoor School—But Jack Linton Tackles the Flames Single-Handed



Grangemoor to Guard Her

By Marjorie Stanton

All Punishments Cancelled

"FIRE! Fire!"

The cry of alarm had not yet shattered the dignified silence of Grangemoor School. But it could be only a few moments before many a startled scholar became suddenly aware of smoke and flames issuing from the ancient belfry.

Meanwhile, Jack Linton had clattered down the stairway of Challenger's House and was streaking for the belfry.

For half a dozen seconds he was running bare-headed through the pouring rain. The sopped ground in front of him shimmered in the lightning which frequently stabbed the stormy darkness.

Then he reached cover in the cloisters. It was from one side of the cloistered yard that the old ivy-clad belfry reared itself, and there Jack dived in at a low doorway which served the stone winding aloft in corkscrew fashion.

He did not dash up those worn steps empty-handed. From the passage wall, just inside the main entrance to Challenger's, he had taken a fire extinguisher, kept there for emergencies like the present.

He had the presence of mind, too, to dab a handkerchief hastily in a puddle as he dashed across from Challenger's. Now he put the weighty fire extinguisher down for a moment so that he could use both hands to bind the handkerchief about mouth and nostrils.

His stop was of the briefest, for he had not forgotten that if the belfry burned for another minute even, the papers of such vital importance to Hetty Morland might be lost for ever.

His three pals, Jimmy, Tom and Tubby, would be following him in a few moments. They were collecting other extinguishers.

Half-way to the top of the tower steps Jack encountered smoke billowing down, for the belfry

itself was on fire—at the very top of the picturesque edifice.

The storm's first vicious flash of forked lightning had set the tinder-dry material on fire up there. Straw, birds' nests, ancient beams and joists and wooden laths—all blazed furiously now.

Jack stopped a few steps higher up and smashed in the stud of the extinguisher's nozzle. Instantly the chemicals began to issue out a vapour-like steam.

On again he charged, his eyes tingling with the dense smoke. A few more of the winding steps placed him in sight of the actual flames, and he checked there, directing the extinguishing vapour towards them.

The stuff acted with a rapidity which he had never believed to be possible. There was a dying out of flames that seemed magical.

After a moment or so he was able to advance on to a plank platform—part of it alight—which ran narrowly all round the inside of the walls. It was a gangway for workmen who might at any time have to attend to the clock or the bells which hung in the centre.

The extinguisher, not yet exhausted, was still conquering the blaze. But the smoke was thicker than ever, and doing its best to suffocate him in spite of his makeshift handkerchief-respirator.

There was one desperate and terrible moment of moving still farther along the gangway, so as to play the extinguisher upon a part of the blaze not yet reached. The vapour seemed to be almost used up now. For a moment or so he feared that after all he was to fail.

He would have to stagger away, leaving a piece of blazing material unconquered, and the fire would instantly spread again, and the papers—the papers would be burned!

But the vapour in the fire extinguisher lasted just long enough. The last flames, licking about in the wind which came in at the slatted openings, died out as suddenly as the rest had done. Jack dropped the empty extinguisher, to crash to the plank floor. Only smoke now! So now—the papers. Where were they?

Blinded by the reeking smoke, Jack groped about. A loud shouting from outside the tower told him that a general alarm had gone up.

Those papers! He had to find them and have them out of sight again before masters, prefects, or anyone else turned up.

He was remembering what Dave had said during that last snatched talk before the expulsion. Something about the papers being in an old biscuit tin—stuffed away in a niche, with a jack-daw's nest to help conceal it. Where, then—where was that niche? The criss-crossing timbers seemed to provide scores of niches!

"Ah! Here we are!"

Jack panted that to himself as his right hand fumbled at last at a point just beyond where the worst of the blaze had been, though a charred bird's nest crumbled as his fingers touched it.

"The papers—got them!" he exulted, and reeled away, glad that now he could get away from the dense smoke.

Suddenly a voice below hailed him in a bellowing tone:

"Hi, Jack! Are you there?"

"That you—Jimmy? I'm all right," he hoarsely shouted back, with the wet muffler still in front of his mouth and nostrils. "The fire's out, tell 'em! And now I am coming out!"

Jimmy was near enough at hand to offer Jack aid.

"Got them?" Jimmy panted, referring, of course, to Dave's papers.

"Yep! Whew! Whouf!" Jack coughed and spluttered.

"Good man," Jimmy applauded him.

Before Jack and Jimmy got half-way down the staircase to the ground, they met a group of boys and masters thronging up it. At sight of the two Fourth Form chums, however, and Jack's reassuring assertion that the fire was out, they turned about and flocked down again into the cloisters.

There scores of other boys were crowding, and great was the cheering on account of the fire having been put out so speedily. Suddenly the headmaster appeared.

"It's all right now, sir," said the housemaster.

"Ah, that you, Challenger! I thought as I came across that the glare seemed less. Who put it out?"

"One of my boys—Jack Linton here—used a fire extinguisher. Did the whole thing all by himself, in fact! Rather commendable, sir."

"Linton!" the headmaster cried, giving a devouring look to the owner of that name. "Ha! So you, Linton—you distinguished yourself."

"I only extinguished, sir."

There was a roar of laughter from those who crowded near enough to catch this correction; and even the Head himself smiled.

"Linton, a very creditable deed! Shall we say then, that in extinguishing the fire you have also—h'm, ha—extinguished that displeasure which of late you have incurred from me? I think we may very well say that, Mr. Challenger."

"It would have been a great loss, sir, if the belfry had been destroyed," the housemaster observed.

"Irreparable! One of the most ancient and picturesque features of all Grangemoor! Set alight by lightning, I suppose. Linton, any

penalties that you were undergoing are remitted!"

"Thank you, sir; and, sir——"

"Well, Linton?"

"That also applies, I hope, to my three chums. They did their bit, too, sir!"

"Ha, very well, then—yes, all four of you! And I am bound to say," the Head added, "that this only bears out a belief of mine; that any wrongdoing of late was due to Cardew. Now that he, the instigator of so much lawlessness, has been sent home, I shall hope to hear better accounts of you others. Meantime——"

The Head turned to attend to other matters, and Jack and his chums tried to get away from the crowd, too, but it was only by threatening to recite "The Fireman's Wedding" that Jack at last obtained the exclusive society of Jimmy, Tom and Tubby.

"Gosh, if Dave's papers had been lost!" he commented, tapping a bulge in his breast pocket.

"But they are still O.K., boys."

"Where are you going to keep 'em now?" Jimmy asked. "You know how Gayner has been trying to get hold of them all along."

"Gayner'll be unlucky," was Jack's response. "Smatter of fact, I expect he fancies that Dave took the papers away with him."

"How about letting Hetty have them back now?" Tom softly suggested.

"No! Dave wanted me to take care of them until I heard from him. But I tell you what, chaps; that gating of ours is off now—cheers! We can go down to Joab's at any time we like."

"Fine!" Jimmy nodded. "A talk with Hetty—just the thing; How about to-morrow morning—after school?"

"Get out with your after school." Jack derided that suggestion. "Before brekker, boys, is my mark!"

And so before any other boys were down next morning they dragged out their bicycles and were speeding away from Grangemoor.

A breezy day had followed last evening's thunder-storm. What with the freshness of the early morning and a sense of restored liberties, the four were in high spirits.

They knew that Hetty would be up. With all the work of the place upon her hands, she was busy every morning, they knew, shortly after sunrise.

In the lane leading down to the riverside café something happened to make the chums very nearly come "purlers."

A faint whistle—the glimpsing of a hand as it was advanced from leafy surroundings to give beckoning signs—and Jack was sharply braking, with a warning "whoa!" to those coming on behind.

He and they were next instant dismounted, hearing a rustling in the hedge which set them all staring expectantly.

"Someone wants us—I don't know who!" Jack panted bewilderedly.

He who had whistled and signalled was now head and shoulders clear of the hedge. As he gave a final wriggle to extricate himself completely, he smiled at the bunched-together four.

"Gosh!" Jack gasped. "It's Dave!"

Gayner's Cruel Bluff

"MORNING, you fellows!" "Dave" in the four emitted in varying tones of staggering amazement. "You, Dave—here?"

"Sh!" he cautioned. "What are you doing down this way? Going along to Joab's, when it's out of bounds!"

"Wrong, my son," Jack beamed. "Our stock is at par again in the school. We're teachers' favourites, we are, now! Examples to the school, says the Head—get that?"

"Glad to hear it," Dave said with his sober smile.

The events of overnight were, in the next minute, given in proper sequence, with Dave's mind already set at rest about the papers.

"But it comes to this"—he frowned—"you were jolly brave for the sake of them, Jack. Have you got them on you now?"

"No. Do you want them?"

"So long as they are somewhere safe—and I can trust you fellows about that. But tell me—"

"No, you tell us for a change," Jack objected.

"You're back—more or less in disguise! Gosh, Dave, you had better not let the Head see you dressed like that!"

"I don't intend him to see me," was the laughed answer. "All it means, you fellows, my best chance of getting a meeting with Gayner's guardian—and you know that's my next step—is by being on hand here at Grangemore. I found that out yesterday. There's a big likelihood of Mr. Gordon calling at the school during a motor-run in the west country. I'm going to be on the look-out for him. I know his car—"

"But, man alive!" Jimmy burst in concernedly, "how on earth are you managing for yourself? Where did you kip last night?"

"In the old mill; and I've had a better brekker

this morning than you fellows will get when you go back—as I want you to do, right now," Dave coolly pursued.

"Never mind about talks with Hetty. Far better if you could try to find out at once, at the school, if Gayner is expecting his guardian."

"And let you know?" Tom eagerly inferred. "Right! We'll scout back now."

"Have you really got enough grub to go on with, Dave?" Tubby Bloot wanted to know.

"Anyhow," and he fished out a couple of apples from a pocket, and some milk chocolate, "have these! And at midday I'll bike in to the shops and—"

"Sh!" Dave warned.

His sharp ears had been the first to pick up a significant sound. Now his chums heard the unmistakable rattle of a bicycle being ridden quickly down the lane, all amongst the ruts and loose gravel.

Dave nipped to where he could be out of sight—on the field-side of the hedge.

The others had no sooner remounted their machines and turned them for the run back to school than the approaching cyclist came round a bend. It was Ralph Gayner. At sight of the four he jammed on his brakes and jumped off his bumping bicycle.

But Jack and his pals did not stop to have words with the bullying prefect. With

cheery waves, at which he scowled, they started to race back for Grangemore.

Gayner, tight-lipped, stood glaring after them until they were gone round the bend.

"I can't bother about them now," he muttered to himself, springing back to his saddle. "I must see Hetty Morland and still be back in time for breakfast."

One of the many harassing things for Ralph Gayner at present was a sense of being distinctly out of favour with "Old Tony."

At the gate to the café garden he got off his machine to take the rest of the way on foot. He saw Hetty taking a basket of washed table-linen to a clothes-line, and went across to her.

"Your uncle—not up yet, eh, Hetty?"

"No," she answered, and went on with what she was doing.

"Oh, you're never civil to me," he snapped out. "You'll be sorry some day! I'm like most people, I can be a good friend—or a bad enemy."

She pegged another snowy square of linen to the line, then faced him spiritedly.

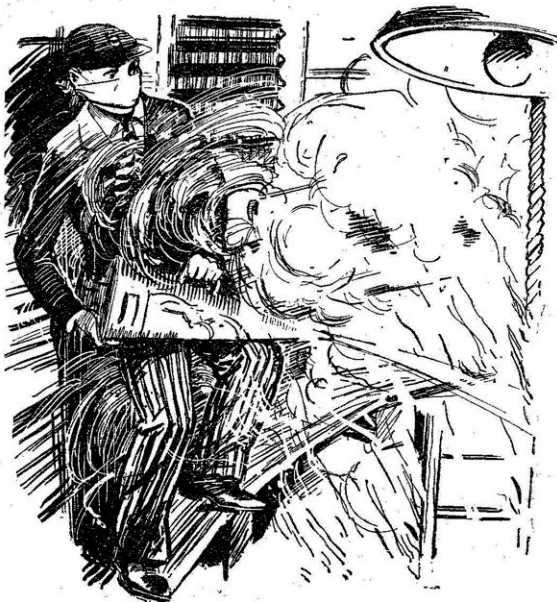
"I don't think you can ever be my friend, Ralph Gayner."

"Oh, I daresay you'd be more willing to listen to that young Cardew chap. Well, do you know he is miles from Grangemore now; kicked out of the school—expelled, see?"

The shock of the words struck her back a little.

"Expelled?" she echoed incredulously.

"And publicly expelled at that," Gayner



Gritting his teeth, Jack Lintoned ged along the narrow, rickety platform, playing the extinguisher on the flames. If he failed to retrieve the vital papers, it would mean that all Dave Cardew's efforts would have been in vain.

But Jack had no intention of failing.

nodded. "There has been nothing like it before in all the time I've been at Grangemoor. Cardew was hoofed out yesterday—sent home—and there he is, in nice disgrace, and whose doing, Hetty, if it wasn't yours?"

Hetty stood with a hand up to her heart, staring aghast at Gayner, who was under the sway of an insensate desire to go on hurting her. Somehow, he felt that striking out at anybody must be a relief to him.

"Cardew was a level-headed, studious chap until you turned his head by consulting him about those papers of yours—as if he were someone who could advise you like a lawyer! That's all the good it has done him, to be asked to turn himself into a private inquiry agent! Now he's expelled. He's to be kicking about at home when his mother returns from a voyage that she only took for her health's sake! What do you think Mrs. Cardew is going to think of her son now he's turned out of Grangemoor?"

"Oh, that will do—"
"But it's not all! What do you think his mother is going to think of you for being the cause of his disgrace? You had better not be here when she comes to Grangemoor—as she is certain to do—to inquire into the whole business!"

"If it is like that, I certainly shall not wait for Mrs. Cardew to turn up," Hetty said faintly. And the words fell as sweetly as music upon Gayner's ears.

He had all he could do to keep a wild look of relief and joy out of his sharp-featured face. His own random utterances, outcome of his mad-dog state, had achieved something that could not fail to be to his immense advantage. They had, he was sure, stamped this girl into sudden determination to go right away—at once!

"That's what you've done for Cardew," he snarled on. "What good have you done yourself? Not a bit of good—only harm! You would rake up the past—get him to try to discover something wonderful about your being entitled to be a grand young lady, really. Oh, I know what was in your head! And instead, you have only come to know that your father was a convict; a man who—"

"I do not know that!" she flashed fiercely. "You have said it, and I don't believe it! That's all, and now you can go! Get out of my sight, you cad," she stamped. "It's you who should have been expelled from Grangemoor—"

"Only I wasn't!" he retorted with a sickly grin. "But I have said enough—although there is just one thing more, now I think of it. Don't count upon getting in touch with Dave Cardew through his pals at the school. They are not exactly bearing you any goodwill now. They know who is to blame for his being expelled. Those fellows, Dave's own sister at Morcove, his mother when she gets back from her voyage—they're all going to despise you."

The heartless, lying voice might have said much more in the same strain, but it would have been unheard by Hetty. She had snatched up the empty wash-basket and was hastening away.

Gayner took almost jaunty returning steps to where he had left his bicycle. The joyful conviction—that she would be gone from the district before the day was out—seemed to mean new life to him. Shame-stricken, she would go away—to vanish completely! It was absolutely certain that she would not let even her uncle know her whereabouts—for she hated her Uncle Ezra.

Gayner, as he got back to his bicycle, was nodding and smiling to himself like one who had suffered fear and knew now that there was nothing more to fear. That girl, with her wretched

packet of papers, had cropped up once to become a terrible menace to his own position as Mr. Gordon's "ward." She would vanish now, though—never to crop up again—

So he was exulting to himself as he rode his machine up the leafy lane, and it was nothing to him that only the most ruthless conduct on his part had achieved such a promising outlook.

Never mind the means employed; the great thing was that he was to gain his own ends!

"Why should I ever know a moment's worry, after this?"

But the way of the transgressor was to be hard for at least a little while yet.

Only a few hundred yards had he ridden when there came the warning tr-ring, ring! of somebody else's cycle bell, and next moment machine and rider whizzed into view.

"Ah, dash!" Gayner raged afresh. "What does this blighter want?"

For it was Percy Denver, that co-prefect who had hinted more than once, just lately; what he wanted was—the price of his silence!

A Bargain Between Schemers

"FOUND you!" oily-haired Denver chuckled, as he and Gayner came within speaking distance in the lane, wheeling their machines. "Rather guessed that you might be down this way."

"Was there any need to come after me? Can't I take a bit of exercise before brekker without having you at my heels?"

"But I like a bike round before breakfast, a morning like this, Gayner," the other responded airily. "You mustn't expect to have the whole world to yourself, my dear fellow. I can understand your not wishing to share—"

"Share what? Look here, Denver, now what are you driving at?"

"Oh, I can go into that with you some other time. Don't be in such a filthy temper, Gayner—when I've done the nice thing by you, coming to find you with this tallywag!"

The buff-coloured envelope, belatedly produced, was snatched at by Gayner. As he opened it and tore out the flimsy, his was a "jumpsiness" which Percy Denver found amusing.

"No business of mine, Gayner—and yet in that way it is! I wonder if that telegram is from your guardian, Mr. Gordon?"

"If you want to know, it is," Gayner sullenly muttered, crushing up the flimsy. "He expects to call at the school some time this evening."

"Splendid!" said Denver, whilst his co-prefect irritably tossed away the ball of paper into the hedge. "Nice for you to have him giving you a look-in, Gayner? I suppose it means a fiver for you when he says good-bye?"

"No, it doesn't! Mr. Gordon isn't that sort at all."

"Not? Anyway, it had better mean that for you, all the same, Gayner. Even if you have to ask him for the fiver. I'm tired of waiting to be paid what you owe me."

"What I owe you! I don't owe you a farthing now!" Gayner protested hotly. "You have had the money—"

"Some of it, quite! A couple of quid—"
"And that's more than I ever did owe you. It's all you are going to get out of me, anyhow!"

"Is it?"
"Confound you—yes!" Gayner gritted, clenching and unclenching his hands. "What do you take me for?"

"Mr. Gordon's ward, of course!" Denver goadingly smiled. "Coming into pots of money some-

day—unless anything goes wrong in the meantime, eh? And so, my dear fellow—don't be a fool and force me to do what I don't want to do. I should so hate having to butt in when your guardian is with you, this evening, to tell him a few things—

"About me?" Gayner said hoarsely.

"More particularly about young Cardew—oh, and that girl down at Joab's, yes!" Denver blandly added. "Though, of course, you would come into it all as well! From what you said, just now, I take it that Mr. Gordon isn't one of your easy-going sort. Bit strict—eh, Gayner? Stickler for principle; just, before he is generous, and all that—eh?"

Gayner's chest went in as if he could not get his breath. In the early morning sunshine his lined forehead glistened with perspiration.

"So now," he panted at last, "you are as good as saying—five pounds, or you will make out to my guardian that Cardew was unjustly expelled? All right; you shall have the money, Denver." And after a hard-breathing pause: "Hush money! And you know what that makes you to be; where you'll go if ever it's found out? But you shall have the money—"

"Right—thanks!"

That cool word or two, coming after such fierce utterances as Gayner had been choking at his victimiser, left them meeting each other's eyes in silence. But only for a long moment had that silence endured when—unmistakably from the direction of Joab's—there came a girl's faint scream.

Hetty, calling out like that; voicing a cry which must have been wrung from her either by pain or shock. To Gayner, there was the scaring suggestion:

"An accident—so that she will be laid up—won't be able to go away, after all!"

As for Denver, the agonised outcry made him think only of the girl's bullying uncle.

"Here, we'd better go and see," Denver said, vaulting on to his bicycle. "I've heard some nasty stories about Joab—the way he treats his niece."

Gayner remounted his bicycle. As suddenly as this, the two who had been involved in a duel of words were riding down the lane together. Denver, young blackguard though he was in many respects, was certainly acting on an impulse to go to beauty in distress. But Gayner—he was only going to see if, disastrously, some accident had befallen the girl.

They were still rattling down the rutty lane when they heard Ezra Joab's truculent voice, shouting now at Hetty and now at somebody else.

"Sounds to me as if he has been bullying her," Denver muttered, "and his knocking her about has bought— Yes, look! A farm-hand—plough-boy, by the look of him."

Their brakes went on; both prefects dismounted, seeing no need to go farther. They had emerged from the lane to see Ezra Joab slouching away from Hetty, who had eyes only for a roughly dressed lad, hurrying away in another direction.

The scene explained what had gone before. Joab was now returning indoors, ashamed of himself. Some bit of bullying of his niece had caused that lad to appear suddenly, pluckily putting himself between man and girl.

"Ploughboy, though?" Denver next moment exclaimed in great excitement. "Not a bit of it! By glory, Gayner, do you see? Quick—before he's gone! I could swear—it's Dave Cardew!"

From Gayner, failing to obtain his own confirming sight of the boy—for the latter had darted out of sight—there came a kind of dazed acceptance of what Denver had asserted. It was flashing upon his mind that Hetty's scream, just now, could have been more attributable to her sudden recognition of Dave, in disguise, than to any roughness on her uncle.

"What do you think of that?" Denver grinned, keeping with Gayner as the latter, in a distraught way, turned back into the lane. "The kid didn't go home, after all! He's still here—"

"Oh, shut up, for heaven's sake!" Gayner groaned.

"Still going on with the case—eh?" Denver persisted tormentingly. "And it seems to have upset you! My dear chap, you look all gone to bits! Anything I can do? Only say!"

At that, Gayner turned to Denver with something of the crazy desperation of a drowning man clutching at a straw.

"Denver!" he abjectly appealed. "I—I can't go on any longer—not alone! I'm going to be beaten if I do! We have had our differences, I know, but—we were pals once—"

"What do you want me to do?" Denver brazenly demanded. "Quick, man, out with it, then! Does it mean I won't get that fiver, if Dave Cardew turns up at the school when your guardian is there? Does it mean that I must keep Cardew out of the way—prevent him, somehow—"

"Denver, if you can only do that!" his hard-driven schoolfellow groaned. "Oh, you don't imagine how grateful I will be—what I'll do for you in the time to come! But mind, if—I do get beaten by Cardew, then there'll be nothing for you ever—can't be. I'll be done for—very likely disowned—yes, by Mr. Gordon—"

Denver, even whilst he listened to all this, must have been thinking what could be done. He spoke at once, in a decisive, crafty way.

"Listen, Gayner. I have it! Buck up, man. Supposing I not only keep Dave out of the way this evening, but get hold of that packet of papers before then and let you have them? How much for me, Gayner? Fifty?"

"Anything—anything, Denver! But Cardew may not have got the papers on him. His pals may be minding them for him now."

"I'm not forgetting that," Denver calmly smiled. "But my little plan takes just that into account!"

JACK LINTON and his chums will have to beware, for Denver obviously suspects they have charge of the papers. You'll be longing to know just what happens, so be sure to read next Tuesday's exciting chapters of this story "that is different."

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