

Meet HER HARUM-SCARUM HIGHNESS in This Issue

The SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN 2¢

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EVERY TUESDAY



SEE "WARNED BY THE PHANTOM!" THE ENTHRALLING MORCOVE STORY INSIDE

Dramatic Story of the Amazing Things Which Happened When the Morcove

WARNED BY THE



COMPLETE THIS WEEK

The One They Mistrusted!

"CAN I lend you a hand, Betty?"

"What? Oh—"

And there Betty Barton broke off, lest any hasty exclamation should betray feelings best kept to herself.

Like the rest of those Morcove chums who were at Priors Wold for part of the Christmas holidays, Betty had learned to dislike—mistrust even—this very pretty young lady, Bella Darrington, who had been an uninvited guest since just before Christmas Eve.

Betty, at this moment, was busy tidying the bed-room which she shared with three of her best chums. The bed-making was her single-handed task, when Bella had turned up at the doorway, to voice an apparently friendly offer of help.

"I think I can manage quite well by myself—thanks all the same."

"But, Betty, I must help somewhere in the house! Most of the servants have already left, and the rest are going now!"

"I know. But—"

"Very unreasonable of them, too, I think!" Bella Darrington spoke on, a sudden sourness in her voice. "Most inconsiderate!"

"In fairness," Betty demurred, whilst spreading sheets and blankets, "they did offer to stay on for another day—even pass another night here—only Mrs. Cardew said she could not ask it of them."

"If I had been Mrs. Cardew, I would have insisted upon their giving proper notice!"

"I doubt if they could have been held to it. This is a very lonely old house, and the nights are at their longest. After the bad scares there have been—making the staff feel that the place must be haunted—"

"Haunted!" And Bella, as she took a cigarette from her silver case, laughed derisively. "How



—Girls and the Grangemoor Boys Were—

PHANTOM



BY MARJORIE STANTON

absurd! You and your chums don't suppose that the Black Rider is really a spook, Betty?"

"No. But it is easy to understand how the maids feel, after dark. Remember, they have to go up to bed-rooms, last thing, that are a good way from—"

"It's the class they belong to," sneered Bella, striking a match. "Well!"—flourishing out the match after lighting up. "I don't intend to go! I'm staying on, like you girls and all the rest of the guests."

Betty smiled, but said nothing.

"Besides," came from touched-up lips which held the cigarette, "think of the fresh upset this morning! That poor boy, Dave Cardew—Mrs. Cardew's own son—missing! And yet the servants have left!"

"Only because Mrs. Cardew would insist upon their going."

"More use out of the way, than in the way—I suppose. They must be a lot! Oh, well, as we guests are staying on in practically a servantless house—I must get busy!"

She turned to go from the room with a great air of industry—then checked.

"I wonder, Betty, what has become of Dave Cardew! Such a nice boy! And another terrible snowstorm in the night! He must have been out in it, too. He appears to have gone out during the night—not just before daylight this morning. His bed was not slept in!"

"No."

"Aren't you worrying, anyhow? You do seem to be taking it calmly, Betty! He may have lost his life in the snow!"

"Oh, I refuse to imagine such a thing," said

Betty, starting upon the last bed to be made. "Dave is not the one to come to grief over anything he does. He always thinks well beforehand and takes everything into account."

Betty spread the last sheets and blankets. She tucked them in, and then went on so briskly with final tidying that Bella Darrington took the hint and drifted away.

The moment she knew herself to be alone, Betty stood still, looking towards the doorway as if she could see the young lady still there—talking, angling for information.

Then this schoolgirl, who in term-time was chief of the Study No. 12 chummary at Morcove, went to a window and stood gazing out.

All the great wastes of the lonely Cotswolds were under very deep snow this morning. There had been another blizzard in the night, so that around Priors Wold, at this moment, there were only footprints made since daybreak.

Enough of them, to be sure! Betty could see them, and they gave some comfort to a mind which was by no means as unworried on account of missing Dave as Bella Darrington had fancied.

Three hours now since so many anxious searchers had set out, in their twos and threes. None had yet returned, but, at any rate, there was this wide-spread search going on. Fathers and other grown-ups belonging to the Priors Wold house-party; the missing boy's own best pals—four of them—and some of Betty's girl chums.

Betty herself had longed to take part, but she had decided to deny herself and do the less attractive thing—be of help about the house.

Nor was she the only Morcovian who had realised that at a time like this it was not a case of doing just as one wished.

The team spirit!—one to do this, and the other to do that, and so between them the old Morcove slogan would be lived up to: "We'll manage!"

"Miss—"

"Hallo, Maisie! So you, anyhow, are not going to leave us!"

"No, miss! I didn't ask last night to be allowed to go in the morning."

"Yes, so we heard overnight, Maisie. You're not afraid, then?"

A strange look passed across the comely face of the young servant as Betty spoke. It meant great agitation, as Betty could tell, and yet, somehow, the nervousness seemed to have nothing to do with superstitious dread.

"I—I don't wish it to be thought, miss, that I am boasting of being able to stay on, when all the rest were too afraid to do so. The strain's

The Phantom's Threat:

"THE BLACK RIDER WILL
COME AGAIN TO-NIGHT!"

Morcove's Retort:

"LET HIM COME—WE'LL
CATCH HIM YET!"

been more than they could be expected to stand." "But it hasn't affected you in quite the same way?"

Betty felt she had quite startled this honest-looking housemaid by making that suggestion. Maisie Turner turned her eyes away, whilst the pallor of her cheeks almost matched the whiteness of the snow outside.

"I—I mustn't stay here talking," Maisie said flusteredly. "I'm only—"

The rest was never said. At that instant both Maisie and Betty were startled by a sudden great outcry downstairs.

It was no panicky screaming such as had occurred last night, when servants had been terrified by another sight of that phantom-like figure which was so mysteriously haunting the district.

"What on earth!" Betty exclaimed. "Is it only some comic set-out downstairs in the kitchen? I can hear Naomer yelling like mad. She has been 'helping' with the cooking, you know. Or is it— Yes, it is!" Betty became joyfully convinced. "News of Dave! Oh, come on!"

Taking it for granted that Maisie was following, Betty simply flashed along to the stairs.

Down one flight and then another she raced, hearing the babel of voices become more distinctive.

Then Naomer rushed up from the kitchen regions, yelling shrilly:

"Betty! Bett-ee! Queek!" Now, as Betty came flump! to the floor, after making the jump from the last few stairs, the shrill voice cried on:

"Bekas, Dave is safe, Betty! He is back! He is coming in now!"

How Did He Do It?

NEVER in her life had Betty known more amazement and relief packed into a single moment.

"What!" she cried. "Back?"

"Yes, bekas—queek, go to zis hall window and you can zee him! I tell you," Naomer shrilled, rushing across with her elbow to the window, "it is Dave, and he's riding a horse!"

Joy filled Betty at the news.

"I'm so glad!" Betty cried, and remained with Naomer at that hall window.

"Bekas, look at him, as cool as ze cucumber! Not a bit like as if he had been missing! Hooray, anyhow, bekas—jolly good job!"

Betty nodded. She wanted to cheer at the top of her voice. If her gladness did not become vocal, that was because amazement was tying her tongue as it was also keeping her motionless.

Dave, astride a horse that was ploughing its way through the deep snow, had several members of the household running out to meet him. There was his mother; his sister Judy was another. Betty also noticed Paula Creel, who had stayed at home to do the work of a kitchen-maid.

But, except for those who had rushed out by some side-door or other to greet him, Dave was alone. He had returned without bringing any of those who had gone to search for him.

"What ze diggings, I'm off out to him—queek!"

So was Betty now. She shook off the spell that surprise had placed upon her and ran out by the front door. She and Naomer fairly galloped together over the trodden snow, at the same time waving jubilantly.

Betty and the dusky one got to Dave when he had dismounted from a tired-looking horse whose nostrils smoked in the wintry cold.

His mother and sister were trying to keep calm, but were not succeeding very well. He himself seemed only to wonder why there should be this excitement, this hysterical delight over his return.

"Bai Jove, Betty deah, gweat welief, what?" Paula ejaculated. "Yes, wather! We could hardly believe our eyes, bai Jove, when we saw him—fwom the kitchen window!"

"Dave!" cried Betty, now that he was able to

see who was here, beside his mother and sister. "Are you all right?"

"All right, Betty? Of course I am!"

Paula chortled in an unstrung way.

"Haw, haw, haw; he's all right, bai Jove! Most wemawakable, what? Haw, haw, haw!"

"Well, Dave," Betty smiled, "we've been feeling dreadfully alarmed, you know!"

"So mother has been saying—Judy, too," he responded, in an astonished tone. "But I'm sure I didn't mean you to be anxious."

"Oh, Dave," his widowed mother reproached him tenderly. "When, at daybreak this morning, your room was empty, your bed unslipped in!"

"Quite, mother. But I did think my note—"

"Note?" echoed all who heard him, blankly. "What note?"

His dark brows went up.

"I left a note that should have prevented any anxiety. I put it just under the door of the room that Jack and Tom share. It was addressed to Jack, but he was to pass it round."

"Jack never had it," Dave's mother stated very definitely. "The note was not found."

Dave shrugged.

"Then it must have been taken before Jack and Tom were up," he said. "That's obvious now."

"Taken?" cried Judy. "How do you mean, Dave?"

He turned to the horse and patted its arched neck.

"I must stable this fellow at once, mother. He's whacked. I don't know when he had his last feed. He shall have a good one now, and a brisk rub down."

At that moment Betty found her gaze being attracted away from the lad. She noted, first, the figure of Maisie, the parlourmaid, over by the house door, looking strangely excited.

And from that figure Betty's gaze went next to someone at a window of the house—Bella Darlington, staring this way so fixedly that her eyes were as large, dark patches in an otherwise white face.

"But, Dave!" his schoolgirl sister called after him as he walked the horse in the direction of the stable. "Whose horse was it before you got hold of it? He must have belonged to someone!"

"Yes—the Black Rider."

And, with that for another of his laconic answers, Dave went away with the horse, leaving all who had heard those last words simply speechless with amazement.

Morcove Carries On!

PRIORS WOLD, before another hour had sped, was full of life and laughter once more.

The search parties were back. Some had returned soon after Dave's reappearance, meaning to go out again, but now there was no need. The rest had been hastily looked for, and so spared further needless exertion.

Dave stood exonerated from all blame. It was not his fault that there had been such anxiety on his account; he had taken the precaution to leave behind a note, in the night, which should have set all minds at rest—if only that note had been found where he left it!

"And Tom and I saw no note!" was Jack's repeated disclaimer, when the whole affair was being debated by the juniors all over again. "There wasn't any note lying just inside the door on our bed-room floor, was there, Tom?"

"Absolutely no!"
 "Then I would like to know who had it before you two boys were up!" Polly Linton said in a fresh explosion of indignation.

"Can't you guess?" smiled Dave.

"Yes!" Polly snapped. "Of course I can guess; but it's not the same as being able to prove it! That girl, Bella Darr—"

"Sh, not so loud, Polly!"
 "Oh, if she's sneaking around, wanting to hear—let her hear! It's time things came to a head with that uninvited guest, I reckon. Time she was asked to leave!"

"Think so? Well, I don't." Dave mildly dissented, turning away to the door. "See you all later," he meaningly added—and was gone, to get some sleep.

His withdrawal resulted in most of the other juniors realising that this was not the time for continuing the talk. They had sat with Dave, in the dining-room, where he had been enjoying a mid-morning "breakfast"—which Naomer claimed to have cooked! At any rate, she had been the one to bring it to table when he was ready for it.

Away went Betty and other Morcovians—some at a scamper back to the kitchen regions, others to hurl themselves once more into housework elsewhere. And the boys were soon making themselves useful, too!

There was fat Tubby, bringing fresh fuel from the wood and coal sheds, a job Tubby liked, because it kept him in close contact with the kitchen.

Naomer was not a moment out of the kitchen, and every time Tubby passed through he came in for a "snack" from the pantry.

"Bekas, Tubby, we don't know what time lunch will be ready!" was the dusky one's stated reason for serving him with titbits.

Prompt to the minute, after all, however, went the gong. Mrs. Cardew herself, with the "help" of Naomer, had soon got the cooking done.

Morcove had laid the table, and it looked as dainty as ever. Those grown-ups who were Morcove parents playfully said that this was one of the surprises of their lifetime—to find that daughters COULD be so domesticated.

Dave did not come down.

"Sleeping like a log," was the assurance Jimmy conveyed to the large party that was now sitting down at table.

It transpired that the note slipped under Jack and Tom's bed-room door had simply said:

"If I am not back when you read this, you'll know where I am—at Medcombe Manor—"

And there, whilst the wintry night wore away, Dave had lurked—waiting and watching!



"Whose horse was it before you got hold of it, Dave?"
 Judy called after her brother. "It must have belonged to someone!" Dave smiled grimly. "Yes, the Black Rider!"
 was his startling answer.

Just before dawn he had seen the Black Rider—again.

Man and rider had come at a walking pace, at that last hour of the black night, to Medcombe Manor. And then, suddenly—if the rider himself had remained unsuspecting of Dave's presence, the horse had not.

All in an instant the horse shied badly in the deep snow—and threw his rider.

With only a moment to decide what to do, Dave had certainly acted with great presence of mind. Whilst the man was still wallowing in the snow, the quick-witted lad had rushed out and dashed to seize the horse.

"It seemed better to get hold of the horse and leave the man, just then," Dave had continued his explanation. "I nearly did the trick, too, but not quite. The horse shied and cantered off. I chased after him—well, it must have been a couple of miles, and when I caught him he was as badly lost as I was. The snow hadn't stopped. There was nothing to give me my direction. So, when I came upon an empty cattle-lair, which I had hoped was a cottage, I decided to shelter there."

Most of the table-talk became further comment on Dave's thrilling adventure. But it was all carried on in gratified tones. Dave had not suffered the least harm, hardly fellow that he was. And surely it had put a bit of a "stopper" on

the mystery man, that he was now without his horse, anyway! Bravo, Dave!

Only, there sat Bella Darrington, forgetting now and then to be as vivacious as usual; lapsing into thoughtful silence, as if Dave's success were a setback to some secret scheme of her own.

Was it possible that she, who was enjoying the hospitality of Priors Wold, was actually hand-in-glove with—the Black Rider?

"Perhaps," Bunny Trevor presently sparkled, "the Black Rider will turn up to claim his horse—to-night!"

"Oh, I hope not!" laughed Mrs. Cardew. "For you girls and boys will be on your own this evening. Yewleigh Court was on the 'phone about their party for to-night, and I feel that those who were invited must go. They will feel so disappointed."

"No reason, mumsie, why you and the rest shouldn't go," cried Judy. "If Morcove can't take care of itself—Grangemoor can guard us!"

"Unless," chuckled one of the grown-ups, "Grangemoor decides to go off to lie in wait at Medcombe Manor again?"

"Nunno," said Jack gaily. "Medcombe Manor is off for a bit, anyhow. What would be the use? The Black Rider will be giving that place a wide berth now, you may be sure. So don't worry; we chaps will keep Morcove usefully occupied. One thing, they'll have dinner to cook—"

"We thought you boys might cook for us girls," Polly chipped in. "For a change!"

"No!" objected Naomer strenuously. "Eckas, I'm ze one to see after ze dinner, and as for Grangemoor—zey can wash up after-the-wards!"

"Ha, ha, ha."

Betty, as the laughter died away, spoke across to Bella Darrington.

"Are you going to Yewleigh Court to-night?" "I am sure," Mrs. Cardew quickly interposed, "Bella could come along, and they would welcome her." The party at Yewleigh Court was for grown-ups only; quite an important social event in the district. "If you like, Bella, I will ring up in advance and tell them—"

"Oh, thanks awfully, Mrs. Cardew; it is kind of you, as usual," was the gushing answer. "But I feel—no, I had better remain behind. I shall be someone"—with a little laugh—"to keep an eye on the juniors!"

"Very well; just as you please."

"Let her stay, since she wants to," Polly grimly whispered to Betty. "And perhaps it will be as well for us to keep an eye upon her!"

Peril for Pam!

TALL Pam Willoughby, Morcove's "little lady of Swanlake," came down from her room, a little while later, wearing her riding kit.

Very dainty and dashing Pam looked in her tailor-mades, although she had not given a thought, whilst changing, as to how she looked—whether "all correct" or otherwise.

Pam had been only thinking, then, that she MUST have five minutes on the back of Dave's "capture." For a horse to be in the stables and for her not to try him out was unimaginable.

Dave wouldn't mind a scrap, she was positive. He knew her love of horses and how she had had her own pony to ride as soon as she could toddle.

"You're a beauty," she murmured, having quietly entered the dim stable where Dave had left the black steed so comfortably stalled.

"Phantom—for that's what we'd better call you!—how do you feel now, boy?"

He brought his head round, as far as the halter would allow, his fine eyes taking stock of this young person who so evidently understood him and his kind. He stopped grinning at a bit of hay for a moment, then resumed.

Pam stood close to him, drawing a hand caressingly down his sleek neck. He liked her, and went on seeking more tasty wisps from the well-filled rack of hay.

"Only long hay, is it?" Pam spoke to him softly. "We'll put something through the chaff-cutter presently, Phantom; find a few oats for you, too, if we can. But do you feel better already? Come, then, boy; leave that for a bit and let's see how you and I get on together."

Having made Phantom ready, she untied him from the halter and led him out into the snowy yard. There was a mounting-block, belonging to an age when country folk were in and out of the saddle all day long. Pam used it, so as to be more sure of mounting quickly and getting control of the animal.

Her horsemanship was so good that he responded perfectly. Seated, she reached forwards and patted his neck as he kept so quiet.

Then she cantered him out of the yard, which had been mostly cleared of snow, but checked him to a walking pace as soon as open ground was reached.

The snowballers saw her, and were thrown into sudden amazement at what she was doing.

Jack, Tom and Tubby waved their caps from a little distance away. Bunny picked herself up from where she had just been bowled over in the snow, and joined in the laughter with which Betty and Polly and one or two others were greeting Pam's appearance.

"Hooray!" she was cheered; but there were some facetious comments as well.

"Wow, it's the Black Rider again!"

"And it's only a girl, after all!"

"Whoa, Pam—half a tick! And we'll hitch on a couple of the toboggans!"

All of which Pam received with her usual serenity, conferring an airy wave of a gloved hand upon the merry-makers whilst she headed Phantom for the snowy wastes.

Although she had to let her mount only plod through the deep snow, she was enjoying this spree immensely. It was something after her own heart.

Nor was she without hope of finding a place, presently, where Phantom could be cantered, if not galloped. The wind had a way of whizzing the snow away on the tops of the hills, leaving a bare two inches. She knew of a "sheep walk" that ran right along the top of one bit of upland—firm ground, smooth and green as a lawn in summer-time.

For a little while the laughter and cries of her snowballing chums came after her, in the silence of the snow-blanketed countryside. Once, at the top of a rise, she looked back and saw the snowball fight still raging, with Priors Wold looking so grey and old in its setting of snow.

Then she looked before her as Phantom had to pick his way down a gentle slope, to go up the other side of the dip to that level stretch which she had in mind.

He seemed to her to be enjoying the airing. She must, she realised, be a featherweight to him, whose real owner was the Black Rider! A man—and what a mystery man that unknown was!

Pam fell into a train of thought about the incidents of this winter holiday at Priors Wold; the baffling mystery which she and her chums had found so thrilling, so fascinating.

Before ever they and the rest of the Yuletide party turned up at Priors Wold, this lonely district had been frightened by the phantom-like figure seen riding by night.

Country folk, trying not to yield to inborn superstition, had yet been forced to believe that the Rider was—must be—a spectre.

Her love of all animals, and a hatred of all forms of unkindness to mankind's dumb friends, made Pam treat Phantom to some petting attentions. This lovely creature, his coat as shiny-black as an ebony ruler, had been put to hard use lately.

Nights of bitter cold and blinding snowstorms, when he had been ridden about on these bleak, shelterless wastes—for SOME strange purpose or other!

"But you're not going to be treated like that any more, Phantom. He won't get hold of you again. That stable for you to-night, down at Priors Wold—and some of us will slip out to you, too, last thing, to say good-night, my beauty!"

Phantom dipped his head and then tossed it in the pleased way of a cavalry charger, as if he quite knew that he was in good hands.

Perfect in his response to her handling of him,

he started into a canter when conditions underfoot made it safe for her to give the hint.

And then, suddenly, she checked him to a complete standstill.

She had felt she had better do that, and perhaps decide to turn back, for the white wastes ahead of her showed a moving figure—a youngish man who had stepped out from the shelter of a solitary clump of wind-twisted trees.

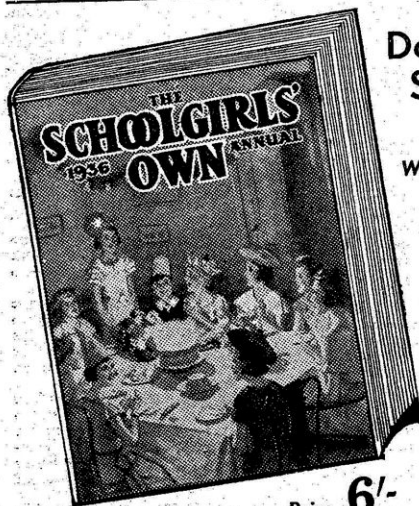
He came walking towards her briskly from a few hundred yards away, and now she could tell that his clothes were of a peculiar kind—all black, but not the "best black" that countrymen reserve for Sundays and festivities. He wore not an overcoat but a cloak. And his head was bare—why?

Another moment, and she was wondering: had he dispensed with his hat because it was a three-cornered one?

If so, then he was the Black Rider himself! The mere suspicion would have been enough, in any case, to make Pam turn her horse about. But now, changing suspicion to alarming certainty, the man whistled—to her mount.

She felt Phantom wanting to respond to that whistled signal—one which he had been taught to obey. She and he had made friends with each other; but she was not his rightful master—and this man was!

(Continued on the next page.)



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The Black Rider himself—running towards her now, since she was desperately trying to prevent Phantom from obeying the call and cantering to him!

Out here, on these lonely, snowy uplands—she had encountered the man himself.

And, by the look of him as he came rushing up, she could tell that he himself was desperate—in the mood to stop at nothing, to recover his lost mount!

The Message That Held a Menace!

"PHANTOM! Come on, now—come on, get round, will you!"

But, no! She could not turn him, with the hope of galloping him away. She was nothing to him, now that his own master had appeared, giving that whistled signal.

Stubborn as a mule, now, was this mettlesome horse. He became even resentful of her handling of him—opposed her in all her skilful attempts to ride him away from his rightful master, who was now calling upon him to "Stand!"

Pam would have been thrown now, the horse pranced and reared so, only this was not the first time she had to keep her seat upon a bucking mount.

These were exciting moments, during which she had no fear for herself—even at the hands of the Black Rider. She was only thinking, tragically, she was going to lose the horse—undo all the good work done by Dave in the night! And that would be terrible. This man, by recovering his well-trained steed—

And now he was so close as to make a grab at the bridle. She had nothing with which to hit out at him, except her riding-crop. She pluckily struck out at the Black Rider, determined to beat him off. But unfortunately the riding-crop slipped from her hand and went whirling into the snow.

Defenceless, she could only keep her seat whilst the horse, now greatly excited, plunged and pattered round and round. The man had hold of the reins, so had Pam. She was looking down at him fiercely.

"Get away!" her eyes said, as he glared up at her with a look which meant:

"Come down, you little fool! He's my horse—and I'll have him!"

And then, suddenly, it was he who went down. Not for nothing, after all, had Pam stuck to her! It had caused him so to divide his attention—that, by pure accident, he was knocked off balance by the horse.

Phantom brought his head down and round with a snort, catching the man a swinging blow.

Down in the snow, and Phantom was nudging him. Only a horse's sense of smell saved the man from a kick. He was thinking only of rolling out of the snow.

"Come!" she called, as she saw her desperate horse.

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Phantom in then. Deeper snow, and rabbit holes—all the risks there were of Phantom bowing over like a shot rabbit himself, with herself underneath him!

She laughed thankfully when, where the slope began, Phantom answered to the check. She got him to take it quite slowly down the hillside, and then his hard plodding up the opposite rise was her chance for looking behind.

No sign of the Black Rider. It would have surprised her if there had been!

She laughed again. She was retaining an amused smile when, next minute, she suddenly beheld a boyish figure running towards her from away upon her left.

Jimmy Cherrol!

"Hallo, Jimmy!" she greeted him serenely as soon as he had floundered within speaking distance. "Where are the others, then?"

"Oh, they—they didn't come with me. I just thought I'd come out this way. I was hours when you set off—saw you from a distance."

"Oh," she nodded, and her eyes were on the ground now he was going to keep her company all the way back.

"You didn't see me—just now, did you?"

"Yes, I did, Pam! And didn't I see you? I say, I'm frightfully sorry, I was too far off to be of any help. That man—trying to grab you—give up the horse—he was the Black Rider?"

"Yes, well—"

"Oh, Pam!"

"It's all right," she smiled. And after a little pause:

"You weren't so very far off from me, Jimmy. You never are, are you?"

And now you're making fun of me!"

"Jimmy," she said, looking down into his upturned face, "I am not!"

But Jimmy, when, presently, it all became known at Priors, Wold, had to stand a good deal of teasing by Jack and Tom and a few of the girls.

As for Pam, her girl chums went to her at her having emerged safe and sound from an experience which ranked with those of the night. Now, if Grangemoor had achieved anything so had Morcove!

Judy's mother and some of the other girls were bound to tell Pam that she had done a job known better than to take the horse. But any censuring words were soon forgotten by the fond and admiring smiles which surrounded them.

A couple of hours after dark, the same night, some of the juniors slipped round to see Phantom for the last time that night. Following one another to the yard, and lighting the way with a lantern, they had warmed up after several days of idleness.

Phantom was quite at home in the stable, enjoying his sweet-smelling hay. Pam herself had attended to him. They all stood round him for a moment, petting him, and then left him to his hay. He had a well-filled rack to resort to if necessary.

Indoors again, and some of the juniors were in the various rooms to change and get ready for the evening. But the night was quiet. Priors, Wold was just then in the quiet of the evening, and the girls were getting dressed.

"And zen, when they have all gone to bed," Naomer gave her anticipatory nod.

whisked into the bed-room, pulling Paula with her. "Bekas— Hallo, though, what ze diggings!"

After goggling her eyes for a moment at something which, most unexpectedly, lay upon the dressing-table, she flashed round to face Betty and Polly as they entered.

"Here, Betty—queek! Bekas, look—a note for you!"

"A—note?"

Incredulously Betty stared at the envelope, after she had crossed over and taken it up. The inscription was simply, "Betty," as any chum of hers might have put upon a note for her, at school. But who was there, here at Priors Wold, who could have needed to write her a note?

Polly thought quickly, then gave an emphatic shake of the head.

"No—say nothing! They have given us a grand time over Christmas. Don't let's spoil their special treat. Besides! Even if he does come—we girls are a big enough batch, and we've always got the boys!"

"Right," Betty nodded. "We'll manage! But, Polly dear—who is it has warned us like this? It can't have been Bella Darrington, if she is in league with that man? For it is a friendly warning, surely!"

But Polly was not so sure.

"It could be Bella Darrington—if there is a catch in it," was her reply. "And that, you may depend, is where the real danger lies!"



The man grabbed at the reins. Wildly the horse reared, but Pam, splendid horsewoman that she was, remained firm in the saddle. She was not afraid of the man, although she felt certain he was the Black Rider.

She tore open the envelope, took out a folded half-sheet of notepaper, and then gave a slight start as she read what was written.

It must have seemed better to her to say nothing in front of Naomer and Paula, for she only laughed. Afterwards, she contrived to get outside the room with Polly.

"Look!"

And Polly read:

"THE BLACK RIDER WILL COME AGAIN TO-NIGHT."

"What shall we do?" Betty asked her chum in a whisper. "I mean, shall we show this warning to Mrs. Cardew? If we do, she and the rest will not go to that affair at Yewleigh Court."

On Their Own!

BUMP! Young Tubby Bloot threw a mighty log upon the hall fire, and then another—and another after that!

Morcove and Co. meant to enjoy a jolly blaze to-night, left all by themselves as they were, except for Bella Darrington and that one servant who had so loyally stayed on.

The cars had just left, grinding away in low gears and with chains upon their wheels. Last parting cries had been exchanged between the juniors, at the porch, and the grown-ups; then the outer door had been banged shut upon the bitter cold night.

"Hooray! We're all on our own—hurrah!"
 "Twas Christmas Day in the workhouse!"
 Jack recited, winding up the gramophone.
 "And the paupers were eating their Christmas fare!" Talking of which, you girls—we fellows would like you to serve dinner nice and early. In fact, you can start right now—"

"Nothing doing," Polly replied. "Those who want anything know where to get it. If you boys think we girls are going to spend the evening waiting on you—"

"But this," cried Jack, looking greatly shocked, "is mutiny! Weren't you girls distinctly told—"

"No-o-o!"
 "Didn't I myself," Jack raised his voice to a very cheeky batch of Morcovians, "write out the menu for your little bachelor party? Soup, fish, joint, hot roast turkey, two veg, pudding, ices, coffee—"

A rival shout interrupted. It was Naomer, standing on a hall chair to ensure a better hearing.

"Hi, now listen! Bekas, in ze dining-room, take what you like! And when zat is all gone, in ze pantry—"

"Dining-room first," Jack bellowed. "Come on, boys; line up for the Bread Stakes. And when I say 'GO'— Hey, come back, Tubby. Toe the mark, Tubby! Don't," Jack entreated, shoving his fat pal back to the imaginary line, "disgrace the old school tie!"

Now all the girls stood by, to laugh at the way all five Grangemoorians—for Dave was entering into the joke—were getting into line for the dash. Jack was reprimanding Tubby for "cheating," when suddenly Polly, Bunny, Naomer, and two or three more, simply flashed to the dining-room.

Surging in, they closed the door instantly with a mighty slam!

Grangemoor's roar of rage at being thus shut out was answered by mocking peals of laughter.

Subsequently, the very loudest remarks came from those girls who had locked themselves in the room; tantalising comments on what delicious things they had found to eat!

"Shame," said Jack fiercely. "But don't cry, Tubby. It cannot be—no, Fate would never be so cruel as to mean us to starve! There is always the pantry, boys!"

"You can have it!" shrilled Naomer, from the dining-room. "Bekas, I was going to eggsplain; zere is nothing there—only remains!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Tis false," Jack gritted. "Heed not the voice of that traitress! 'B' Company, fall in! By the right, quick march!"

And he, putting himself at the head of his comrades, began a very effective imitation of a drum-and-fire band, as they trotted out to the kitchen regions.

In no hurry did they return, so it was evident they were not faring so very badly after all. The dining-room door was unlocked to admit any other girls who were inclined to "dine" now, and presently most of the Morcove chums were returning to the hall, plates and tumblers in hand.

There, in a half-circle round the blazing fire, they were enjoying most tasty eatables, when the boys came back similarly plate-laden.

At that instant they became aware of Bella Darrington descending from upstairs. She did not come across to join them at the hall fire, but turned off into a passage leading to the kitchen.

Some glances were exchanged. Neither Morcove nor Grangemoor had been forgetting Bella and their definite mistrust of her.

She was back almost immediately, remarking airily:

"I don't see Maisie Turner in the kitchen. I want her to take some more coals up to my bedroom."

"Maisie has finished for the day," Betty said quietly. "She has worked hard enough for three since first thing. We told her we wouldn't want to bother her, and she was very grateful."

"She talked of going to her own room and not coming down again," Judy supplemented. "I expect she will go to bed. She slept badly last night."

"We all did that," Bella suggested, as if it were no excuse.

"I'll take up a scuttle for you presently," Dave offered, "and leave it outside your room."

"Oh, thanks, but—I can wait upon myself!"
 Bella Darrington's nerves seemed to be strung up this evening. She went back to the kitchen and they heard her go out to the coal-shed, although there was no need for her to have done so. She could have drawn quite enough coal from the stock already indoors.

Betty was studying Dave's face, for he was looking extra thoughtful, when suddenly Bella Darrington came running back to them, all making an excitable outcry.

"That horse—it's gone!"
 "What! Never—oh—"

"How can you say 'Never' when I'm telling you!" Bella cried, resenting the startled cries with which all the juniors jumped up. "It's gone, I'm positive! The stable door is open. I believe I even saw the man himself, but I won't say for certain!"

She was not asked to say anything more. The juniors were even then surging away, to rush en-masse to a back door opening on to the inner yard.

From that doorway the stables could be seen, and they all saw that a stable door which had been left locked upon Phantom was now standing wide open.

Excitement would have caused every one of the juniors to go across to the outbuilding, but Dave called out that the girls had better be careful or they would take cold, for the night was one of iron frost.

But Betty, Polly and one or two others went with the lads, finding it necessary to step carefully, for there was a danger of slipping. Where they trod unswept snow it crackled underfoot like breaking glass.

Phantom was gone, right enough, and in a few moments they were trying to find tracks.

"It's not snowing to-night," Polly excitedly commented. "So there will be tracks that we can follow! But why—why did we give the man a chance to come and sneak his horse back! I wanted a watch to be kept, turn and turn about, only Dave said not!"

"I know I did," came Dave's perfectly calm admission. "But now, wait a moment, some of you."

He moved off across the starlit yard, but not alone. Betty and Polly followed, as did Jack and Jimmy, until, at the far side of the yard, the snow became too deep for the girls in their thin house slippers. They had to turn back, leaving the three boys to go over open ground beyond the yard, peering about for any telltale tracks.

At last Dave and his two chums returned to Betty and Polly.

"Come on back indoors," he advised tersely. "The man hasn't been here."

"What!" stared Polly.

"He couldn't have crept to the stables without leaving footprints—and there are none. I know exactly what tracks there were at nightfall. That horse has been turned loose by—well, by someone in the house."

Along with understanding gasps from Betty and other girls came Polly's furious outburst:

"Ah! You mean—Bella Darrington! She has—"

"What about me?" broke in the icy voice of Bella herself, from just inside the house doorway. "What have I been doing?"

Polly, in spite of checking signs from others, flared out again:

"You have opened that stable door and let the horse go! You have turned him adrift—driven him away—"

"Absurd! You must be potty! Really—"

"Oh, yes, you can put on that tone—"

"But you, please understand, must not put on THAT tone to me!" Bella hotly retorted. "How dare she?" was her indignant appeal to the other juniors. "As if I wanted you to lose the horse! Do you think I am a—a sort of personal friend of that mystery man," she laughed, "or what?"

"We can't stand here," Dave said, evidently wanting to closure the argument. "Let's all get back to the fire."

"I shall not join you, after that!" Bella snapped. "I consider I have been insulted, and in the morning I shall let Mrs. Cardew know."

"All right," said Polly. "Do that! We may let her know something, too. It's time we did!"

"Oh? More insinuations?"

For a moment Bella stood waging a battle of looks with Polly. Then, with a contemptuous shrug and a laugh, the young lady stalked away—showing every sign of injured innocence.

She had gone upon her way upstairs when the juniors were all back in the warm lounge-hall.

"Pity you said what you did, Polly," Betty deplored.

"Oh, well!" Morcove's headstrong one retorted. "She is a fraud, that girl!"

"But to let her know that we know," Dave submitted, "is not the best way to go to work."

"Then what would YOU have us do?" Polly rounded on him. Once again, she was exasperated by Dave's composure.

"Just carry on—enjoy ourselves," he smiled. "It's all right. Presently she will be down, to tell us that she has seen the Black Rider and urging us all to go out to try and catch him."



"Maisie Turner, the one servant who did not want to leave Priors Wold. That's rather curious, isn't it?" Bella Darrington said with a sneer. Suddenly she whipped open the cupboard door. Betty and her chums stared incredulously. Crouching inside was—Maisie!

"You seem to be pretty sure!"

Dave only nodded that he was—fairly certain! And all the girls excepting Polly simply had to burst out laughing.

"Well, I'm blown!" Jack chuckled, passing a hand across his forehead. "This is the last time I'll ever spend the hols with Polly and Dave! One or the other, but not the two of them together!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

That further laugh was dying away when—"Hark!" several of them jerked.

Bella Darrington was coming downstairs again in a great hurry.

"The Black Rider!" she shouted as she came hastening down the last flight of stairs into the hall. "I've seen him! Oh, quick—all of you—he can be seen!"

Not one of them moved. Most of them looked at Dave, whose face was perfectly impassive.

"Well!" Bella gaped at them all. "Aren't you all going out after him? It's a chance—to-night! No fresh snow—black frost—you will surely catch him this time!"

Still the juniors stood motionless and mute.

"Or is it that you are—afraid?" Bella sneered. "Well, I am surprised! You boys, anyway—will you go if I come with you?"

"No," said Dave quietly.

Her eyes were fixed upon him.

"You don't believe me when I tell you? I saw the Black Rider—on horseback again—from a window upstairs."

"What I don't believe," said Dave, "is that he is to be caught—that way."

And, crossing over to the gramophone, he set it going with a dance tune.

Accused!

IT was another one-step, starting some ten minutes after Bella Darrington had again withdrawn upstairs, in a very affronted manner, for which Betty found herself partnering Dave.

As soon as she was off with him, working round a hall floor that was crowded with other juvenile couples, Betty said to him in playful reproach:

"You are leading Polly a life, Dave! Keeping things so to yourself!"

"It isn't that I have wanted to," he smiled. "But it doesn't do to gab about things too much. Even as it is, Polly has rather put her foot in it this evening."

"Anyway, Dave—what made you guess that Bella would start that scare about the Black Rider being outside the house again to-night? Was it the warning that we had—the mysterious message

addressed to me? Bella wrote it, so as to make us all the more inclined to—"

"Bella didn't write that warning message—"
"She didn't? We wondered, you know, if it were a trick of hers—"

"I know you did," came his quiet answer, whilst the gramophone hurtled out the dance music. "But Bella had nothing to do with that message."

"Then who—"

"Maisie Turner."

When Dave said that, Betty stopped dancing. She dropped out instantly, taking Dave with her to the fireside.

"Maisie Turner, Dave? My goodness, we never thought of that! But—"

"It was a genuine warning, too. Somehow, Maisie must have been aware that the Black Rider would come to-night. I reckoned that he would prefer to come—when we had all been lured out of doors, away from the house, on a false alarm."

"You mean—a false alarm raised by Bella Darrington. Oh! Now I see!" Betty gasped. "And that is why—"

She got no further, suddenly espying Bella Darrington coming down into the thronged hall again.

Others, catching sight of the girl, stopped dancing. Another moment and all were at a standstill, with the gramophone turned off.

Just Look at This!

IF you enjoy reading stories of school life, mystery, travel and adventure, then THE SCHOOLGIRL is the paper for you.

It is published every Saturday, price twopence, and every week it boasts a varied programme of fine stories by favourite authors.

In the issue now on sale there is a powerful long complete story of Barbara Redfern and Co. on holiday in London; a complete story featuring "THE BUSY 'BEA,'" by Iris Holt (of Dodo Wren fame); a grand complete tale of the famous FLYING SISTERS, air aces of the African jungle, by Ida Melbourne; and a gripping mystery drama by Elsie Trevor. Every week, too, there are a number of fascinating and helpful articles.

IN THIS WEEK'S NUMBER THERE IS NEWS OF A WONDERFUL FREE GIFT SHORTLY TO BE PRESENTED.

The Schoolgirl—2d.

"I thought you said," Bella spoke to them all, in a subdued voice, "that Maisie Turner had gone to bed, being so tired? But she is not in her room."

"She isn't?" Judy returned, in great surprise. "That housemaid is in your mother's room," were Bella's next words, startling all her hearers. "I happened to be passing, and noticed a light under the door. Knowing that Mrs. Cardew is out for the evening, I wondered! Then I looked through the keyhole. I saw Maisie Turner. Had she any right to be there, when she is supposed to have gone to bed?"

"I—I don't quite understand, if she is there," Judy answered, looking distressed. "She's a perfectly straight girl, so it must be all right. But I'll go up."

"I'll come with you," Dave offered. "But don't let it be a crowd, this time."

His sister, who was like him for taking things quietly, chose Betty and Polly to go with her, and this choice evidently met with his approval. He and the three girls went upstairs, Bella accompanying them, unasked.

Reaching the closed door, they stood grouped for a moment or so, listening. They could tell; the room was in darkness now.

Not a sound came out to them.

"You in there, Maisie?" Judy calmly inquired.

No answer!

Then Judy opened the door and strode in, clicking on a light. The others followed.

"Is everything all right?" Bella anxiously appealed to Judy. "Nothing been touched?"

A shake of the head was the only response. To all three Morcovians the lovely bed-room was just as it would be left by a lady who had gone out for the evening.

"You had better make sure," Bella urged. "That housemaid was here just now, even if she has gone away."

Judy crossed over to the handsome dressing-table and pulled open a certain drawer. She knew that it was there her mother kept things which would be most likely to tempt anyone minded to pilfer.

"No! I can't see that any of mother's trinket-cases have been— But where," Judy broke off, changing to a wondering tone, "is mother's special bunch of keys that she always keeps in this drawer?"

"Oh, aren't they there?" Bella eagerly questioned.

"I don't see them now. No," after some rummaging about. "Strange! Mother would never have taken them with her to the party. It's a big bunch—heavy."

Betty and Polly saw Bella turning rather triumphantly to Dave.

"Then what does it mean, Dave? You heard your sister! Has that housemaid—"

"Oh, no."

At that dissenting murmur from Dave, Bella frowned angrily.

"You think she is all right, do you? But this is not good enough for me, let me tell you! Remember, I was a stranger to Mrs. Cardew and all of you, when I was taken in for Christmas! I am not going to have it imagined that I have been doing something dishonest in the house to-night, when really it is that housemaid's doing! The one servant who did NOT want to leave Priors Wold—that's rather curious, too, isn't it?"

The vicious outburst had no sooner ended than Bella suddenly strode across to a large hanging-

cupboard. She whipped open one of its doors—then stood back sharply, exclaiming:

"Ah!"

For there, in that hanging-cupboard, was Maisie Turner!

During the next moment or two, the only movements in the room were those made by Maisie herself, as she came out of the cupboard.

When the door was first whipped open, they had all seen her standing rigid—showing every sign of having tried not to breathe even, whilst in hiding. Now she stood before them, her white face wearing an agonised look.

"Maisie," Judy put an end to the sensational silence, "what does this mean?"

"I was doing no harm, miss—"

"Oh!" Bella interposed furiously. "How can you lie like that? When we've caught you in the act!"

"In the act of what?" Dave asked quietly.

"Anyway, hiding in the cupboard—hoping we would go away," Bella snapped at him. "And we didn't! Somehow, something told me to look in that cupboard! And now—"

"Quiet, please," Judy entreated. "Maisie, you haven't touched anything belonging to my mother?"

"She doesn't answer!" Bella triumphantly commented on the housemaid's embarrassed silence. "Search her, then—search her!"

"You can't do that," Dave warned gravely; but the words were barely uttered when Bella made a little rush at Maisie and grabbed at her dress where a pocket might be.

"It's a bunch of keys!" came the convinced cry from the uninvited guest of Priors Wold, as she felt what the pocket held. "Deny it, Maisie Turner, if you dare, and I'll put my hand in and take them out—I will, myself!"

"That's enough," Judy again implored. "Maisie, if you have keys in that pocket—please let us see them. You must."

Then the wretched-looking housemaid—one whom Morcovie had so liked—put a hand into her dress pocket and drew out quite a large bunch of keys on a ring.

Judy took them from her. A glance, and then came the sighing remark:

"They're mother's—the ones that were in the drawer."

"Right!" Bella Darrington laughed fiercely. "That's quite enough; that's all I want to know! She's a thief—and that's why she didn't want to leave when the rest were leaving! It was to be her chance, to-night—with Mrs. Cardew and the rest of the grown-ups away! A chance to loot the place, and I—I was to be suspected, blamed! I, who was taken on trust by Mrs. Cardew; I was to go to prison for—"

"Oh, no, no—no!" came the interrupting cry from Maisie. "Nothing of the sort! It isn't so—believe me!" she appealed, in that agonised voice, to the juniors.

"Believe her!" Bella sneered, drawing off to the door. "After catching her in the act—with the keys in her pocket! Keys, I dare say, that would open a safe, a strong-room—give her a free hand everywhere! Wait till Mrs. Cardew gets back, my girl! Wait till the morning—"

"It's what we had better do," Betty said distressfully. "Anyway, please don't keep on—"

"Oh, you! You didn't mind when Polly Linton made insinuations against me! Yet 'you don't

"WARNED BY THE PHANTOM!"*(Continued from page 841.)*

like it, that I accuse this servant of being a thief, and of intending to incriminate me! Pah, I'm done with you girls and boys!" Bella finished, and flung out of the room. "A lot of idiots!"

Her violent closing of the door, after passing out, was followed by a most dramatic stillness in the room.

Maisie, the object of the juniors' gaze, swayed a little; she put up a shaking hand to her forehead, as if pained by a violent throbbing.

"Why," Judy asked at last, very gently, "why did you come to this room of mother's and take that bunch of keys?"

"Don't expect her to answer," Dave startled the girls by interposing quickly. "Don't ask her—"

"Why ever not!" gasped Polly. "It's a perfectly fair question to ask, surely!"

"It wouldn't be kind."

Polly was silent after that. "Unkind!" Such a reason for not pressing the question must have silenced any girl who counted in the life of Morcove School.

Maisie turned tearfully to Dave—the level-headed, clever lad, with all his instinctive chivalry. Never in their lives had the three schoolgirls seen a look more eloquent of gratitude than the one she had for Dave!

It was he who spoke next, without any self-important air, although he must have realised that supreme decisions were being left to him.

"Betty—and you, Polly—although I know you'll think it a bit puzzling of me again, will you go downstairs and I'll come with you? I want us to rejoin the others down there and get the fun going again—just as if this had never happened."

"Right-ho!" Betty said promptly, nor did Polly demur.

"And you, Judy," he said to his sister. "I think you might stay with Maisie for a bit. She's very upset. You will find that my sister," he addressed the emotional-looking housemaid, "is a good one to have with you—just now."

"Go on, then," Judy whispered her two chums and her brother. "And I'll remain."

Dave turned away to the door and there waited for Betty and Polly to precede him.

IN the beautiful boudoir-like bed-room which was her mother's, Judy stood mute and still, simply waiting for Maisie Turner to get over the worst of her agitation.

Best to say nothing! At any moment, Judy expected, this unhappy girl would quaver a remark about going away to her own room. Then she, Judy, would go with her, to continue the solacing companionship which Dave had prescribed. One must be guided by Dave. He always understood. Ah, and how amazingly he seemed to understand everything—now!

But the tragic stillness, the silence between Judy and the anguished workgirl, went on for a minute—two minutes—whilst from downstairs came, most ironically, sounds which told of resumed jollity.

Jocular voices, peals of girlish laughter and now and then a great guffaw from one of the boys; even the gramophone was going again, hurtling out more jazz.

Strange music, that, to be accompanying such a real-life drama as was being enacted at Priors Wold!

Suddenly Maisie broke the silence of the room with a terrible cry of anguish, as if suffering a paroxysm of grief that was more than could be endured.

She dropped down into a chair and, once more burying her white face in her hands, sobbed again and again.

Judy moved close to her and rested a pitying hand upon the bowed, shaking shoulders.

"Maisie! Oh, what is it?" she asked tenderly.

"Better if I had never been born," came the strange, agonised murmur.

"Hush! You mustn't say that. Never mind now what that horrid Darrington girl said."

"I am not thinking of her," moaned Maisie Turner. "I am not thinking of her!"

Then—of whom?

But Judy would not put the question. Not after Dave's warning.

She remained mute as before, feeling utterly mystified; feeling, too, a great compassion for this hapless girl who was struggling to master a grief which had surely left her life in ruins!

[END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.]

The Phantom Tracked at Last! The Black Rider Will Ride no More!

Who rode through the snow on a coal-black horse, scaring all those who saw him?

You will learn the answer to this absorbing problem when you read how the Morcove Chums and the Grangemoor Boys trap the Phantom—in next week's enthralling LONG COMPLETE story.