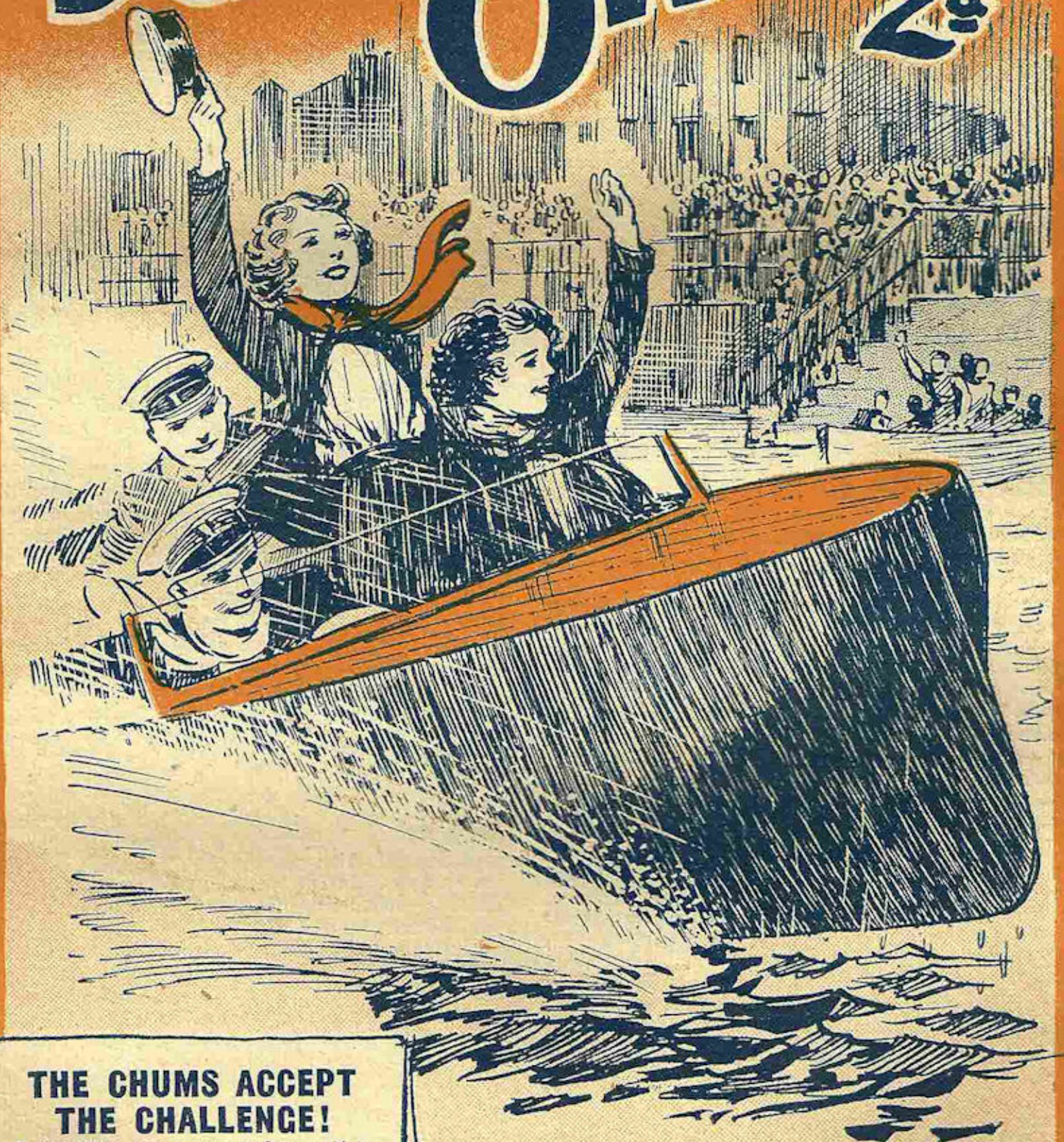


"When Morcove Took Command" Enthralling Morcove
Holiday Story Inside

The SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN 2d



**THE CHUMS ACCEPT
THE CHALLENGE!**

A thrilling moment from this
week's grand long Morcove
and Grangemoor holiday story

No. 794. Vol. 31.
Week ending
April 25th, 1936.
EVERY TUESDAY.

"THE CRIMSON SHADOWS" EXCITING COMPLETE 'SECRET
SOCIETY' SERIES WITHIN

Enthralling, Long, Complete Holiday Story of the Chums of—

When Morcove Took—



The Speedboat

“BARELY daylight, Polly!”

“But I’m going to get up, all the same, Betty!”

“Oh, rather. And first of all, we’ll see what the weather is like.”

“You can hear the waves. Has the sea roughened in the night?”

“Goodness, hope not!”

Of all the hundreds of guests whom the Grand Hotel, Southville, was entertaining for Easter, probably these two schoolgirls were the only ones to be awake at such a very early hour.

One was Betty Barton, in term-time a Form captain at Morcove School; the other, her best of all chums, made-up Polly Linton.

They had spoken across to each other in subdued voices just then, not wishing to disturb occupants of adjoining rooms. Quietly, but with anxious haste, they left their beds and darted to the window.

It was one that overlooked Southville’s fine promenade and took in a wide view of sea and sky. Instantly both girls received a rather alarming impression of a doubtful dawning of this Easter Monday.

The sky was overcast, and away to the east the horizon held only a cold, wan light that did nothing to banish the leaden greyness of the sea.

Inshore, the breaking waves seemed to be plunging to the shingle with a sullen roar. Betty and Polly, whose school was by the sea in North Devon, knew from experience that the weather omens were none too good.

“But we really can’t be sure,” Betty said with desperate optimism. “After all, the sun is hardly up yet.”

“Dashed shame, if we do

get a rotten day,” Polly grimaced. “But suppose we do—any chance of the contest being put off?”

“Shouldn’t think so,” Betty regretfully shook her head. “They’ll have to go through with the programme. Thousands of people have come to Southville for Easter on purpose to see the speedboats do their stunts. And very few of the holiday-makers can stay on after to-day.”

“Um! Oh, well,” Polly smiled grimly, “whatever the weather—it’ll be the same for all the boats! And perhaps OUR boat will be as good as any of its rivals, in a nasty sea.”

“Our boat!” echoed Betty, and then she gave an excited little laugh. “But so it is, in a way! Paula Creel is Morcove, and it’s her sort-of-an-uncle, Mr. Geoffrey Creel, who has invented the Silver Swift. So we have every reason for wanting him to win.”

“Any amount of reasons,” Polly murmured, whilst she and Betty now started to get washed and dressed with all speed. “If only he can put up a fine showing to-day, Betty, he’ll be made for life—after spending almost his last penny on the Silver Swift. If he fails—then think how awful it will be for him and his daughter.”

“And she is such a little brick! We have all become so fond of her. No girl, I’m sure, could have done more for her father than Alice Creel. The way she has kept house for him over there at West Dykes—whilst attending day school, too! I’d like to see Mr. Creel do wonders with the Silver Swift, so that he and Alice could have all they wanted.”

“Besides,” Polly chattered on softly, “he deserves to win, after the wicked attempts there have been to prevent him from competing. We know very well, if all of us hadn’t done our best, the last

On the very eve of the great Speedboat Contest, disaster befalls the one entrant in whom Morcove and Grangemoor are vitally interested. Can the chums save the situation?

—Morcove and Grangemoor

Command



By Marjorie Stanton

ILLUSTRATED BY L. SHIELDS

few days and nights, to guard his place—something would have happened!"

Betty nodded, still hurrying with her dressing.

"Yes, Polly, it was lucky for Geoffrey Creel that Morcove and Co. flocked into Southville for the Easter hols. A good deal has happened, too, in spite of our all taking turns at guarding the speedboats. What about the other night, Polly?"

The reminder caused Polly to look as black as thunder.

"Somebody ought to have gone to prison for that, Betty!" and added: "Nearly ready, if you are!"

"Two ticks," Betty said, darting to the dressing-table, "and then we can be off. Slip down quietly—"

"And go along to the Creel place, of course? We shan't be too early for them," Polly confidently remarked. "Anyway, we can find whoever is on guard. But what I expect—they'll all be about!"

"Shouldn't wonder if work has been going on all night. From what the boys have told us, it has been a race against time ever since—the other night."

Once again Betty was using those three words, in allusion to something which could not be called a setback, for it had been an affair of far greater consequence than that.

Nor could it be called an accident, when there had been definite evidence of foul play—a crafty attempt to "out" the Silver Swift.

There would have been no speedboat of that name to take part in to-day's thrilling contests if the struggling inventor had not had Morcove and Co. to help him in his frantic attempts to make good all the harm done—"the other night"!

There had even been an appalling moment, that night, when the stricken Silver Swift was sinking before their eyes where she was docked at West Dykes. But Alice and her father had had at least two Morcove girls and a couple of Grangemoor boys to help save the boat.

Never would Betty, who had been one of those to take part in the desperate work, forget how she and the rest had bailed and bailed, as if their very lives depended upon keeping the Silver Swift afloat.

Fine team work that had been—and in the end it had done the trick! Mr. Creel, whilst the girls and boys were bailing as fast as they could, had at last located the under-water damage that an enemy hand had managed to perpetrate.

In a few moments, the big leak had been temporarily caulked, and after that the last of the bailing had gone on triumphantly, cheers coming when the Silver Swift was back at her normal level!

Betty and Polly now crept away from their hotel bed-room, to be off at a run upon the errand which friendship had dictated.

Not a sound had they heard to suggest that anyone sleeping in rooms along this corridor was also about so early. But suddenly, as they were tiptoeing along, a door silently came open, and two of their Morcove chums were with them—fully dressed.

Bunny Trevor and Tess Trelawney were the two who, smiling an excited "Morning!" to Betty and Polly, went on with those girls to the stairs.

There was an exchange of eager, whispered remarks during the hasty descent to the deserted ground floor.

Not for some time yet would the staff be about. There was only the night porter to regard the four girls with amazement as they made their lively appearance.

"Early enough, young ladies, aren't you?" he rather aggrievedly commented, whilst unfastening the great front door to let them pass out. "What 'ud your parents say?"

"Oh, they know us," Betty smiled. "Thanks!"

And, one of the doors being opened to them, out they went, racing down the few wide steps to the pavement, and then streaking across the deserted roadway to the wide parade.

The daylight had strengthened, but what a cheerless dawn it still was, with a breeze blowing that seemed to be strengthening every minute. The loose rope of a flagstaff slapped loudly. Glancing aside to the beach as they set off briskly in a westerly direction, the girls liked the look of this morning's waves less than ever.

Then they reached the glass-fronted case which contained everything for the information of visitors about weather and tides. Morcove first looked at the barometer.

"Oh, not so bad!" Betty cheerily commented "If she keeps to that—can't grumble!"

On again they hurried, passing a placard:

"GREAT EASTER ATTRACTION!"

And below this there was another big-print announcement:

"GRAND SPEEDBOAT CONTEST
£1,000 IN PRIZES."

But the four girls did not pause to read any

of the smaller print in this bill, which was only one of hundreds posted about the seaside town.

They knew all the advertisements of the contest by heart, having read them so often in the last few days.

The different "events" in which the speedboats were to compete; the conditions governing the various contests; the names of all the boats which were rivals to the Silver Swift, and their owners and pilots—all this any of the chums could have recited from memory!

"And yet we all turned up in Southville the other day," Bunny suddenly exclaimed, "without the faintest idea of how we were going to get mixed up with this speedboat business! It was not until we saw one of those bills for the first time——"

"You mean, when Paula saw it," Polly chipped in, "and knew at once that the Geoffrey Creel, who had entered the Silver Swift, must be a relation of hers!"

"I say, girls—look," Tess gravely exclaimed, pointing out to sea; but she did not mean them all to stand still to gaze. She herself was walking as fast as ever whilst she pointed.

"There's a speedboat now——"

"Gosh, yes—and how she is travelling!" Polly said, with as much dismay as admiration. "One of Mr. Creel's rivals, of course! They've all been showing off in advance—not meeting with any hitches or breakdowns, either! Whilst he——"

Polly let a rueful grimace say the rest. It was enough. Full well her present companions could share those pitying thoughts which were hers in regard to the inventor. Like her, they could hardly rejoice to see a speedboat making such a fine showing now, a mile away from the shore, when they felt sure she was one of those whom Mr. Creel had to beat—if he could!

And what a big IF it had become.

For all they knew at this moment, the Silver Swift might not even be ready for sea this morning—and the competitions were due to start at two o'clock! She had suffered a breakdown of her delicate machinery during her last trial in open water. Then there had been the nefarious attempt to sink her whilst in dock under repair.

But neither the inventor nor his friends in need had given way to despair. Work had gone on ever since that represented a brave struggle to overcome all cruel setbacks—a last desperate attempt to be in time!

Suddenly the early morning light grew stronger, enabling the hastening girls to see the speedboat, out yonder, all the more clearly. Good visibility was necessary, for at the best of times there was not much of her to see from a mile away.

All the speedboats that holiday crowds at Southville had seen "stunting," during the last few days, were alike in having very little superstructure.

Built for nimbleness and terrific speed, they were small craft, and to be on board one of them meant being huddled down close to roaring engines. At a distance, one never saw much more than those metal-framed spray-shields.

"Look at her skimming about now!" Polly quite resentfully muttered. "Dash! That boat's a perfect marvel!"

"I think she must be doing tricks that she has never done before, in sight from the parade," Betty murmured, keeping frowning eyes upon the speedboat. "I suppose, it is because there's not a soul about—except ourselves."

"Now, if only SHE were the Silver Swift!" sighed Bunny. "Some hopes, then, for Mr. Creel! Just look at her—like a knife through the waves. Round again! And now she is coming towards the shore."

"But—just a sec," Tess said in sudden great excitement. "It's my belief——"

Pausing, she stood still so as to be able to gaze more fixedly at the lively little boat which was now and then lost in the white spray. Very keen vision had Tess. As a born artist, fond of sketching from nature, she was extremely quick at noticing detail.

"If you ask me, girls—that is the Silver Swift!"

"What!" gasped her chums. "Oh, Tess!" Feeling that what she had said was far too good to be possible, they were imploring her not to raise tantalising hopes. "Don't——"

"But I am right!" she joyfully insisted. "That is why she is suddenly coming inshore. See—she is heading for the channel which lets her in, between the shingle banks, to the creek beside the marsh."

For a moment longer the others gazed. Then one of them—it was Polly—gave a leap of delight and clapped her hands.

"It is—it is!" Polly shouted. "The Silver Swift—hurrah!"

Anticipation!

"COME on, then!"

"Yes—let's race her to the channel!" Jubilantly they galloped on again, although there was really no need for such great haste. They had only to go a short distance and they would be at the inlet to the creek—long before the Silver Swift reached it.

But there was this wild relief and joy to set them tearing along the top of a tamarisk-planted shingle bank which extended westwards from the end of the asphalt parade.

She was the Silver Swift, right enough—and from what they had just seen of her performance at sea, she was in perfect form after all!

"Wonderful! Marvellous!" panted Polly. "When, two minutes ago, we even doubted whether she would be able to take part to-day! Hallo! There's one of the boys!"

This was not an allusion to anyone seen on board the speedboat. Nobody could be seen as she came leisurely inshore, bouncing to the waves that ran with her.

Tess had suddenly sighted a boyish figure standing sentinel-like just where the lengthy bank of shingle was cleft by that narrow channel which was the sea's inlet to the salt-water creek.

"Gosh, and it's Tubby!" laughed Polly. "Looking fatter than ever, all wrapped up as he is—ha, ha, ha!"

"Jolly sensible of him," grinned Betty. "He has had a chilly job, guarding that strip of water. Mustn't he be ready for his brekker, too!"

"Don't worry," gurgled Bunny. "It wouldn't be Tubby not to have had a flask of hot coffee with him—oh, and a chunk of cake to fall back upon, as well. Ahoy!" she hailed the youthful sentinel. "Mor-cove!"

He waved, obviously delighted at their unexpected appearance upon the scene.

"Tubby!" they all voiced together. "Just fancy! The Silver Swift's all right!"

"Isn't it grand!" he said as they joined him, and his honest eyes twinkled above his fat cheeks. "Moonlight when she crept away to sea—and I was here then. It had just come to my turn for

duty—for the channel's been guarded all night. We weren't going to have the Silver Swift bumping into something put in the fairway—like very nearly happened the other morning."

"But how have they managed it all?" Betty cried in a marvelling tone. "At bed-time last night—she was still in such a bad way. Have they been working on her ALL night? Haven't any of you had a wink?"

Tubby ignored these questions.

"Have you girls," he asked with his usual regard for human wants, "had any brekker?"

"No, and we don't want any yet! All we want—"

"Some hot coffee," Tubby smiled fatly, suddenly lugging a huge thermos from his overcoat pocket. "If you'll just start in on that, I think I can find you some rock-cakes."

And he began to struggle with something in another pocket.

"Oh, well, if it's like that!" Bunny sparkled, and she unscrewed the metal cup, then uncorked the flask.

"Hooray!" Polly cheered as the first steaming cupful was poured out. "Stuff to give the troops!"

Tubby now offered the cakes—a great bulging paper bag of them.

As a result, when the Silver Swift came nosing into the channel, the four girls were seated on one of the banks, with Tubby, making quite a jovial breakfast.

The speedboat's engine was shut off and she simply drifted through to the creek. Polly's brother, Jack, and Dave Cardew were aboard her, with the inventor, and it was the very happiest exchange of greetings that took place between the two boys and the girls.

As for Mr. Creel, although his unceasing labours had left him haggard and unkempt, he was in a great state of joy. Never before had Morcove seen him looking so happy.

"And so to breakfast, boys," Jack gaily shouted. "Gosh, Dave, won't a couple of rashers and two fried eggs go down nicely? But you can't be relieved yet, Tubby!" the fat pal was teasingly informed. "Nunno!"

"Shame!" laughed Betty. "Oh, look here, a couple of us girls will relieve Tubby, so he can go along to the bungalow and sit down with you all."

"Shouldn't dream of it!" Tubby chivalrously objected. "You girls—"

"We're just not going to swoop upon the bungalow at a time like this," Polly blithely announced. "Alice has Madge and Paula with her, we know, and they're a help—at least, Madge is!"

"I stay here," Tubby insisted.

"Then stay, and be blowed!" Polly playfully exploded. "Tell you what, then, girls; two of us go to the bungalow and the other two get back to the Grand, to let our chums know the Silver Swift is O.K.—cheers!"

This idea met with general approval, and so, next minute, Betty and Tess were on their way back to the hotel, whilst Bunny and Polly made their way round by the edge of the creek to the Creels' bungalow.

The Silver Swift had already docked in the roofed-over basin which accommodated her just nicely, and those who had been to sea in her were now going along to the bungalow.

Betty and Tess did most of their return journey to the Grand at a scamper. Even now, very few people were about on the promenade. A sudden brightening of the morning was going to make holiday folk, when they did come out for a before-breakfast stroll, feel that they were in for another fine day.

Then, just as the two girls were going up the front steps of the hotel, a gleam of sunshine came. They halted to look towards the sea's eastern horizon and saw silvered water where it had been leaden grey.

Joy upon joy to Morcove, this! Nor were Betty and Tess slow to make known the great news to chums of theirs who, with various Morcove parents, were quartered at the Grand.

Some of these other members of the holiday party were already down from their rooms. Those



Though Tubby Bloot had been "on guard" most of the night he looked fresh and alert. Suddenly he produced a flask of hot coffee and some cakes. Betty, Polly and the rest beamed. This was the spirit that would, they felt sure, bring triumph to the "Silver Swift" and its inventor.

who were not, found either Betty or Tess bursting in upon them, upstairs, after a resounding bang on the door.

That dusky imp, Naomer, thinking it was a maid with early morning tea, shrilled a most eager, "Come in, plis!" when her door was tapped. But it was Betty who whirled in, surprising not only Naomer but Helen Craig as well, that Morcovian having shared the room with the dusky one.

"I can't stop," Betty gaily panted, "for I want to run along to Beach Place and let them all know there! Girls, they've put the Silver Swift right again—"

"They have, Betty?"

"Bekas— Ooo, hooray, gorjus! What ze diggings—"

"We are not going to shout about it, though, downstairs," Betty chuckled. "We've been the only ones to have any faith in Mr. Creel's boat. So—let everybody go on joking about him until they begin to see what the Silver Swift can do after all!"

"Oh," Helen cried, leaping out of bed, "why have I been sleeping on like this when—"

"Me, too!" yelled Naomer. "Bekas, I have been missing heaps of eggscitement! Hi, Betty! Have you seen Tubby? Hi, Betty—"

But Betty was gone. Another lengthy scamper for her along Southville's promenade! This time she went to the eastern end, to that fine marine residence, Beach Place, where more members of the "Morcove Easter rally" were quartered.

This was the house which had been rented, furnished, for Easter, by Mr. and Mrs. Willoughby, parents of Morcove's adored Pam. It was a commodious place, and the Willoughbys had many guests—all associated with Morcove and Grange-moor.

Pam was supposed to be taking things quietly this Easter, as she had only recently been seriously ill after a riding accident. But she was already down from her room when Betty turned up. Everybody staying at Beach Place was on hand, except Mr. Willoughby. He had spent the night at West Dykes.

Invited to stay to breakfast, Betty felt that she might—after all that dashing about! And a most delightful meal it was, the party a big one, in great spirits over the wonderful news, and the sun shining in quite brilliantly now at the breakfast-room windows.

The talk was of the Silver Swift and nothing else. The great day had come—and actually she was ready to meet all rivals!

When, an hour later, Betty started to walk back to the hotel, accompanied by Pam and others, the whole length of the promenade was gay with streamers of bunting and flying flags. Hotels and boarding-houses had all decorated.

Rowing boats and tiny sailing craft dotted the sunlit waters, and a good way out there were some of the speedboats again, "rehearsing."

Time after time Betty's chums stopped dead, exclaiming:

"Look at that one!" And every time Betty was able to answer with a confident laugh:

"That? That's nothing! You wait and see, girls, what the Silver Swift will do!"

Mr. Grandways Makes an Offer

THEN they ran up the front steps of the Grand Hotel, to find friends of theirs in one big batch, in a lounge thronged with guests who had just come away from breakfast.

Everybody was talking about the day's great fixture. Bills that had been on show for a week, announcing the speedboat contests were being studied afresh this morning.

The whole place was noisy with eager, excitable talk. Names of "fancied" speedboats were being bandied about. The fine records of their respective pilots were being discussed. And now and then—loud laughter, at the mention of the Silver Swift and her inventor, "Cranky Creel."

Betty and Co. heard that derisive laughter, and—they laughed, too—but in a different way!

But when Betty herself suddenly came face to face with a certain girl who was not "Morcove" now—although she had been, once!—it seemed only right to do something more than indulge in inward merriment.

"Morning!" Betty smiled.

"Morning!" said haughty Cora Grandways, with the old wide grin. "Well? Going to take all the prizes?"

Betty imitated an uncomfortable laugh. "Give us a chance."

"Oh, but I should think the Silver Swift has a fine chance after all," Cora sneered. "Quite a nice day! Very little wind and no waves to speak of! Surely she won't break down a day like this!"

"I hope not, anyhow."

"Well, there's no harm in hoping! But I am glad I haven't drawn Silver Swift in the hotel sweep! The inventor's name is enough for me—Creel! I never remember Paula Creel being exactly brainy, at Morcove."

Turning away as she finished, Cora was delighted to find that she had set bystanders on the grin by her allusions to "Cranky Creel." She had not spoken quietly. She never did.

Then she saw her pompous father, cigar in mouth, roaring with laughter over some joke of his own, just made to idlers crowding round the announcement-board. He signalled to her and pushed clear of the throng to put himself with her.

"Like to come with me to West Dykes, Cora?" he said in great good spirits. "I've got to get a word with that inventor chap. If he takes my advice, he'll scratch."

"Oh, dad, but it will be such a scream," Cora giggled. "Do let him take part if he still wants to. We want fun as well as thrills!"

"Anyhow, I'm going along now, my girl—"

"Right-ho, I'll just get a hat!"

She rejoined him a minute later wearing a showy scarf as well as a saucy hat, suited to the rest of her expensive dressing. And wealthy Josiah Grandways felt prouder than ever, going down the hotel steps with this handsome daughter of his. He reckoned she was regarded as "a little peach."

"Sorry we got to walk, Cora. But there's no way of getting to that outlandish place by car. I don't know who'll be at that bungalow, besides Cranky Creel and his daughter. But—"

"A whole crowd—all 'Morcove'—most likely," Cora sniggered. "We know how they have been there, morning, noon and night; funny way of spending the holiday, I call it!"

But she was quite wrong in warning her father to expect a crowd. Very wisely, Betty and many others had decided to keep away from West Dykes during these, the last hours before the start of the great contest.

Mr. Creel would probably want to get some sleep, for he had obtained little enough of late. So the kindest thing was to keep away.

The same tactful idea had also actuated some of those who had been at West Dykes throughout the night. Mr. Willoughby was already gone from the bungalow, and so were most of the juniors who had been there when day dawned.

But Cora and her father, as they neared the bungalow, saw that at least a few girls and boys were still on hand. Cora knew that it was Jimmy Cherrol, on guard at the channel, and that Jack and Dave were the two lads who were in evidence at the creekside buildings.

Then there were Polly Linton and Bunny Trevor, at the bungalow itself.

Both girls, wearing aprons for housework, chanced to come out of doors as Mr. Grandways and his daughter marched towards the porch. Polly was going to get in some coals from a shed, whilst Bunny took a bucket to a rain-water tub.

"Uh—you two girls!" Mr. Grandways shouted; and they glared towards him. Noisy wretch!

Polly set down the kitchen scuttle very quietly and came across to him.

"Not so loud, please. Mr. Creel is lying down——"

"What! But I want to see him——"

"I am sure he doesn't want to see you."

"Look here! Not so much impudence, my girl! It means far more to Mr. Creel, my being here, than any of your hanging about—dozens of you!"

Mr. Grandways indicated Bunny, and looked about to try and point out others; but he only saw Alice Creel, who had come to the bungalow's trellised doorway, hearing his loud voice.

Then, as the financier and his pert daughter were going on to that front door, they saw Geoffrey Creel himself.

The inventor was in slippers and he wore a dressing-gown over shirt and trousers. The sunlight tried tired eyes that had been closed, only a few moments since, in sleep. His daughter Alice seemed to implore him to go back, but he gently put her aside whilst receiving Mr. Grandways with a frowning stare.

"Ah, there you are, Creel!" the financier said in a false-hearty way. "Morning! Now look here, old man, I've come along to give you a bit of real friendly advice! You don't want to run that boat of yours to-day! Far better keep her back until she can put up a proper showing!"

As a brief pause did not produce any request that he should step inside, he swallowed his annoyance and resumed:

"Understand, Creel, I'm not one of those who take it for granted that the Silver Swift is just a crazy contraption. People always do laugh at you inventors—until you've delivered the goods. My point is, that you can't hope to deliver your



"The inventor's name is enough for me!" Cora Grandways said sarcastically. "I never remember Paula Creel being exactly brainy at Morcove!" Betty did not answer the insult. It suited her best to pretend to be a little down-hearted over the prospect of Paula's uncle succeeding with his speedboat.

goods to-day. Man, you'll only get yourself laughed at more than ever! Cigar, Creel?"

A shake of the head was the only response.

Mr. Grandways did a half-turn, looking across to the ramshackle buildings.

"She's over there, is she? Can I see her?"

"Sorry, you can't."

"Uh—mistake, Creel, to be like this to me! But I make allowance for your being quite worn out. There it is; you have been struggling along—no assistance——"

"I have had valuable assistance——"

"What! Oh, you mean the boys and girls? Now come, Creel, let's have some sense! The whole town knows that for months you have been pottering along here, making do with scrap plant left behind in those sheds. Your money's gone. Is it to be imagined that in such circumstances you have been able to carry out properly ideas that may have been clever?"

Polly and Bunny had not hesitated to draw near enough to attend to every word. Mr. Creel was letting them see that they were welcome to be silent witnesses, along with his daughter. But Mr. Grandways was letting resentful glances show that he wished all three girls farther.

"Now, look here, Creel," he resumed beguilingly, "I'll make you this friendly proposal. Don't compete to-day. You'll only get yourself laughed at more than ever. Let me come in now

and fix up a business-like agreement. I'll give you a cheque right away for the Silver Swift, in the state she is in to-day, any patent rights to be mine. Fair offer, Creel—generous offer!”

“No, daddy!” Alice cried out, with a clutch upon her father's arm. “Don't you—oh, daddy darling, don't!”

“I am not going to, my dear——”

“What!” shouted Josiah Grandways, falling back a step. “I offer to take a sporting risk of the Silver Swift being no improvement at all on existing ideas about speed boats! I'm putting my money on a thing that has never really been tried out——”

“You are not,” Geoffrey Creel husked fiercely, “for your money, so far as I am concerned, is going to stay in your pocket. I don't want your cheque! I only want you to get out—sharp!”

“Mad, father,” Cora disgustedly exclaimed. “Oh, come away!”

“Very well then; we will leave him,” snorted Mr. Grandways. He bit off the end of a cigar and spat. “Delusions! Worst form of insanity! Good-morning, then, Mr. Geoffrey Creel! Stick to your intention about to-day, then—and I hope it will be fine for you. Ha, ha, ha!”

And, with Cora to share his laughter, he walked away with her.

Polly and Bunny at last withdrew their gaze from those receding figures, to find Alice coaxing her father back to the room where he had been resting.

But again he gently disengaged himself from her constraining grasp.

“You heard everything, girls? So now you hardly need to be told what the game has been,” the inventor said bitterly. “That scoundrel has hoped to get all the fruits of my life's work for a mere song, by driving a bargain with me——”

“At a time when he thinks your hopes are at zero,” Polly exploded. “‘Scoundrel’ is right! And we were right when we suspected that he was doing all he could to prevent your running the boat to-day!”

“But,” Alice suddenly smiled, “the Silver Swift will run! It's all serene, daddy. Forget that man now! Where are you going, daddy?”

“Just across to the shed, my dear.”

As he himself was now smiling, all three girls realised that they need not be uneasy. He would just take a roving, reassuring look at the speedboat, and then return to lie down again.

They went with him to the shed where the Silver Swift was afloat in her little dock. Dave and Jack were there.

“Is she all right, my boys?”

“Quite all right, sir!”

The worn face of the inventor retained a fond smile as he stood, for a full minute, gazing in silence at the boat. Then, nodding contentedly, he turned to his adored daughter, and he and she went away to the bungalow, hand in hand.

“So that was Grandways, just now?” Jack said to Polly and Bunny. “Dave and I felt like coming across to set about him.”

“You did better by staying here,” Polly responded. “It is everything, now, to let Mr. Creel see that you don't mean to leave the speedboat for a moment.”

Dave looked at his wrist-watch.

“He has three hours, anyhow, in which to get some sleep. He needs it badly.”

“Yes,” Bunny whispered. “Shame, if he is not up to the mark when the time comes, now that the Silver Swift is in perfect condition.”

At that instant a strange cry came from the direction of the bungalow; a girlish scream, so alarming to the four in the shed that their faces blanched.

“Goodness,” Polly gasped, “what—what's happened, then? That's Alice!”

They rushed into the open.

Alice was running back to them in wild alarm, whilst she appealed to them in an agonised, frantic tone:

“Oh, quick—quick! Daddy—he's ill—get a doctor, one of you, quick! He is on the floor—ill! He doesn't move. He looks as if—as if he were dying!”

The Decision!

POLLY it was who, less than a minute later, came darting out of the bungalow, to set off at top speed for the town.

She was going to find the nearest doctor and get him to come—at once!

They did not know what was the matter with Mr. Creel. It might be only a fainting fit, or it might be a kind of stroke, brought on by all the strain of the last few weeks. In any case, he was in a collapsed and lifeless state that meant good-bye to all hope of the Silver Swift figuring in to-day's contests!

Polly took the short cut across the marshes. There were intersecting ditches, but plank bridges which had been mischievously removed a few nights ago had since been put back.

She could race along—and how she raced!—finding no difficulty about crossing these wide trenches, in each of which there was stagnant water to the depth of a couple of feet.

That she should be the one to go off for a doctor had been decided in a moment. Jack and Dave needed to stay around, still keeping an eye upon the speedboat. Alice, of course, could not leave her father's side, and the poor girl needed the comfort which Bunny's companionship could offer.

And where, Polly wondered, was the nearest doctor to be found? Somewhere along the western end of the front?

Suddenly Polly checked in her onrush, feeling that it meant no loss of time to take a steady stare at some youthful figures in sight to her, at the extreme end of the parade. Some of her chums, were they? Yes, Betty and some others.

She waved expressively whilst careering on again, and they waved back to her. Then they came off the parade to plunge down on to the low-lying ground and so hurry to meet her.

She could guess why her chums had chanced to be there. As the next best thing to being at the bungalow, they had walked out as far as that, where they could see West Dykes.

A few moments more and she was within shouting distance of the batch, which comprised Betty, Pam, Judy, Madge, Tess and Helen. And such numbers, to Polly, seemed a blessing indeed.

“The nearest doctor—any idea?” was her panted inquiry when she got to them. “Quick, help me to get one—for Mr. Creel! He's ill——”

“What!”

In few words she gave the tragic news. Nor did her listeners waste time by asking for details. Once again the team spirit of Betty and Co. was equal to a sudden call for action.

Betty and four of her chums were off and away instantly, back to the town. As for Polly, she could now return to the bungalow. The hunt for aid

could best be left to those who had not yet done any running about. It went against the grain with Polly to drop out like this; but she realised that she could say a good deal that would take steadying effect upon Alice and the others.

Judy went with her. They got to the bungalow to learn that there was no change in the sufferer's stricken state, and although it did greatly relieve his daughter's anxiety to be assured that a doctor would soon turn up, the next twenty minutes seemed an eternity of suspense.

Then one of Southville's medical men came hurrying upon the scene. The girls who had gone in search of a doctor had soon found one.

He was a man who had a way of heartening a patient's dear ones by a smile of calm confidence.

Betty had come along with the doctor. The rest had gone, some to the hotel and some to Beach Place, to let the grown-ups know. It was likely to be only a few minutes before Mr. Wilboughby and other parents got here.

Meantime, Betty and Polly and Bunny went across to the speedboat shed, to have a word with Jack and Dave.

Even now those two boys were on guard, just as Jimmy Cherrol was still keeping an eye upon the channel. There was the feeling that the sudden illness of Mr. Creel might be seized as a chance to do mischief in secret.

"It's no use our crowding out the bungalow whilst the doctor's there," Betty remarked. "Alice has Judy with her. We shall know in a few minutes I suppose—"

"Dashed bad luck, if ever there was," Polly raged. "Oh, of course, nothing matters so long as it is not a serious illness. And yet—it does matter so terribly now, that the Silver Swift won't be able to compete!"

"Who says she won't?" Jack objected grimly; and the girls stared their amazement.

"Don't be silly!" Polly snorted. "How can she compete when her pilot's like this?"

"My yes," Jack nodded. "But Dave and I have been out in her more than once. We've worked upon her, too, don't forget. Matter of fact, Mr. Creel even let Dave take over when she was out at sea, this morning. What say, Dave? You and I—a shot at that prize money?"

"Dave!" gasped all three girls. "Oh!"

"I've handled her at sea—for just a few minutes," he tersely responded. "Like Jack, I'd give anything to be able to—to not let it make any difference, Mr. Creel's crocking up."

"Then," Polly jerked, "why not? Why not, both of you?"

"That's what I've been saying!" Jack fumed. "Why not! Have a jolly good try, anyhow! But Dave, here—he's such a serious, cautious chump—"

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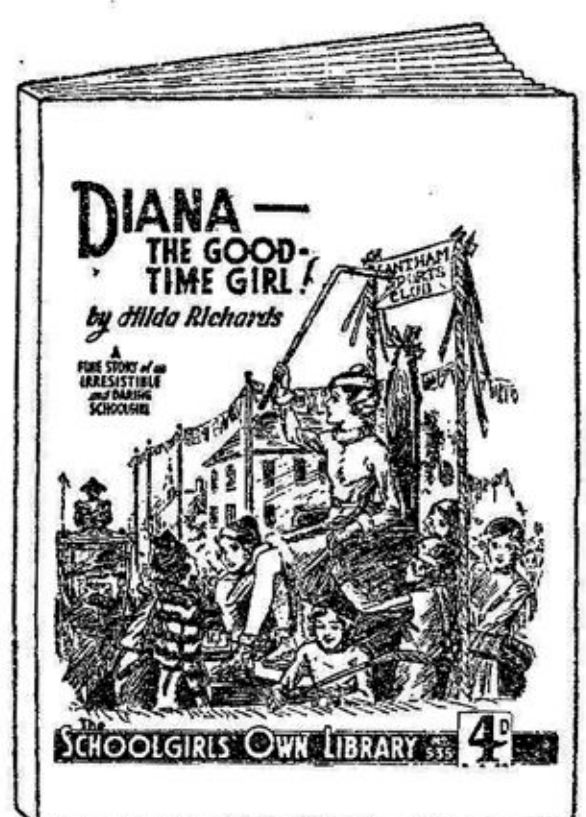


No. 533

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No. 534



No. 535

"Hang it," Dave shrugged, "we must have permission? And who's going to give it?"

"Oh, fiddlesticks," Jack stamped. "What about Nelson and his blind eye and all that guff? Do it first, I say, and get permission afterwards! All I know is, there's a thousand pounds in prizes on offer—and what about Alice? Not to mention her poor father—"

"Who has simply lived for the hour which comes at two o'clock this afternoon," Bunny sighed aloud. "And he won't be there. He has worked, slaved, spent his every penny almost—"

"It was that Grandways, upsetting him as he did!" Polly struck in furiously. "That is what caused the sudden illness, you may be sure! He wasn't in a fit state to— But here comes Judy, so now to hear what the doctor thinks!"

Like her brother, Judy was accustomed to speak in a very sober voice.

"Dr. Mawsby says it is a sort of prolonged fainting. He is bringing him round now; but he says that Mr. Creel must be kept perfectly quiet for the rest of the day. Utter exhaustion has brought it on; has made him unable to stand the upset that Mr. Grandways gave him."

"There, I said so!" Polly seethed. "Well, it's a blessing to know that there is no serious illness. But, oh, can't something be done about the speedboat! Jack—Dave—"

"If Mr. Creel has recovered consciousness, then that makes all the difference in the world," Dave calmly remarked. "In a little while the doctor may let us see him. Then we might ask him."

"Ask him what?" snorted Jack. "You don't want to ask him anything! You just want to tell him—we have made up our minds, and that's what we're going to do! Take out the Silver Swift ourselves, Dave. You and I—"

"With Morcove for crew!" Polly wildly suggested.

"How much?" her brother retorted. "D'you think we're a liner, or what?"

"You can find room for two of us, anyway, same as Mr. Creel found room for you! And you had better; in fact, you must!"

"Talk like that, Polly-wolly, and we will!"

"Then do!" Betty now implored, carried away by excitement. "It's a bargain—it's settled—"

"Why, what good do you reckon you'll be?" Dave gravely smiled.

"If we can't do anything else—we can bring you luck!"

"By heck, and we chaps will need plenty of that all right," Jack grimaced. "O.K., then, boys," he went off into one of his rollicking moods. "Call it a deal! Dave, you'll be pilot. I'm chief engineer—yessir! And Betty and Polly will be—I dunno—"

"Stowaways," gurgled Bunny.

"Stowaways, yes!" cried Polly, clapping.

"Meaning—nobody is to know!"

—
"They're Off!"

NOBODY to know!

It became the watchword of Morcove and Co. during the rest of that fateful morning.

And when the thrilling moment arrived for the Silver Swift to leave dock, everything was done with the greatest secrecy.

Out on to the calm waters of the creek she passed, with only a few friends of those who were on board her to give them a subdued but hearty send-off.

Safely she took the salt-water channel that cut through the shingle bank; and then she was at sea!

Betty and Polly—"stowaways" was the right word for them now! They were so huddled down in the tiny wonder boat that nothing could be seen of them any longer by those who watched.

The Silver Swift, piloted by Dave Cardew, was gone now—gone to play her own brave part, after all, in the great contest!

Dearly would Bunny and others have liked to send one great cheer after another across the sunlit sea, to be heard by those aboard the speedboat. Yet it was just those girls who, normally, would have been so demonstrative, who found the greatest delight in all this secrecy.

The way Southville and its thousands of holiday-makers had laughed at "Cranky Creel" was being remembered. A little while and perhaps it would be the turn of others to laugh!

And the fun for Morcove would be all the greater if, to begin with, the Silver Swift's appearance at the starting-point for the first event came as a complete surprise to the vast sightseeing crowds.

The chums had great hopes of this being so. They knew that Mr. Creel's sudden illness had been rumoured in the town. It was news that had not caused grave concern. There was a good-natured desire to hear a good account of him by-and-by. For the rest, it was taken for granted that he was out of the contest now—"and just as well, poor man!"

If, at half-past one that afternoon, the news had spread like wildfire amongst the bank-holiday crowds that the Silver Swift was even then at sea, Morcove must have known. For they and their grown-ups were here and there, in twos and threes—keeping their ears open and their lips guarded!

But it was all right; the Creel speedboat had slipped away from her lonely anchorage at a time when thousands of people were indoors for lunch. In any case, the Silver Swift had stood little chance of being noticed and identified by loungers on pier or promenade. There was far too much else to claim attention.

Never had there been a grander Easter Monday for Southville. There were some bursts of genial sunshine; and the stiffening breeze was relished. Record crowds came flocking back to the beflagged sea-front well before two o'clock. The pier turnstiles click-clicked rapidly, handling long queues.

Good place, the pier, for watching everything, and it was going to be packed solid with eager crowds!

Then there were the hundreds of row-boats and other tiny pleasure craft spattered over the flashing waters, each with a joyous party. The huge area reserved for the competing speedboats was clearly defined by police-boats and bobbing buoys that flew red flags, so rowing parties and private yachts knew their limit.

The Circe was out—that handsome little yacht which Pam Willoughby's father was entitled to sail, as she "went" with the house he had rented.

And a most boisterous lot of juniors the Circe had on board this afternoon, along with sundry parents, all in high spirits.

Lemonades, fruits and chocolates were in liberal supply, Tubby Bloot being official caterer. And it was at Naomer's suggestion that some sampling of "refresherments" should at once take place.

"Bekas, we shan't have any time for zem when ze programme has begun!"

One great holiday roar came from the crowded parade and the packed pierhead when, after a few practice bursts of speed, the competing boats were seen to be getting into position. The nimble craft were quickly ready for the first event, gathered close to the pierhead, and then the crowd's hubbub died down.

Plenty of eager comment was still going on; but to the occupants of the *Circe*, lying a few hundred yards off the pier, it seemed as if there was a dramatic hush, only broken by the final crying of: "Programmes! Official pro-grammes!"

But suddenly there was tremendous commotion. All the thousands watching everywhere were in uproar. It was a moment when all entrants for the first event—a five-mile-round race—were almost ready for the "Go!" Now, however, one more speedboat had arrived, creating a staggering surprise.

The Silver Swift!

There was something about the whole thing that appealed to the best sporting instincts of all sightseers. Going to run, after all! Give her a cheer then! Hurrah-h-h!"

And now, suddenly:

"They're off!"

Away they flashed on a first straight mile to where the first beflagged buoy bobbed amongst the waves. Roar-r-r! from all the different engines, and a renewed roaring by onlookers:

"Hurrah! Mercury leads—no, she doesn't! Spot Light! And look at Astoria now! Astoria has it!"

For a few seconds "Astoria!" seemed to be the one shout. So gamely she was overtaking the two boats ahead of her.

As for Silver Swift—where was she?

On the *Circe*, as she idly rocked with other small boats close by the course of that first mile, there was frantic looking out for the Silver Swift. Coming now—but oh, last of all!



Alice Creel ran towards the chums in wild alarm. "Quick!" she gasped. "Daddy!—he's ill. Get a doctor!" Dismay overwhelmed the chums. Mr. Creel was ill and the speedboat contest was due to start in a few hours' time!

The boat that was supposed to have "scratched"—and here she was, cutting to her own correct station, after an unnoticed approach. Those navigating her had artfully kept her back until the last possible moment, idling her about in a part of the sea that was altogether unwatched.

"The Silver Swift!"

Fifty thousand throats sent up the recognising shout.

"It's the Silver Swift! The Creel boat—after all!"

"But Creel's ill!"

"Who's piloting her?"

But the crowd was giving a British cheer even before hundreds of pairs of marine glasses had obtained the answer to that question. Then, when it was shouted that there were only two girls and two boys in the Silver Swift and that it was one of the boys who was acting as pilot, then Southville's bank-holiday crowd hurrah'd itself hoarse.

"Go on, Silver Swift!" the *Circe*'s boatload yelled and shouted. "Go on-n-n! Dave!" they dinned at the schoolboy pilot, whose capped head and hunched shoulders were just visible. "Let her rip, Dave! Go on-n-n, man!"

She came roaring past, one of four or five who looked like figuring as mere also-rans. Betty and Polly—they bobbed up from their sheltered seats to wave wildly. Jack megaphoned across to the *Circe*, but what he shouted none could tell.

Then she was gone by, still last in the race—and the first boat already past the one-mile buoy and slashing out to sea on the second lap.

"Mercury! Mercury wins!" the pierhead crowd was now predicting. "Mercury!"

"Sweendle!" exploded the *Circe*'s dusky passenger. "A lemonade, Tubby, to get over zat!"

But by the time a fizzing tumbler was in Naomer's grasp, she had Bunny and others urging her to:

"Look—look!"

The Silver Swift had suddenly put two of the other laggards behind her. A few seconds later and she was fourth at that first buoy.

Gracefully she swept about to head out to sea upon the second mile, knifing through waves that were running straight at her. Gaining still!

And Naomer, standing up to watch and yell with her chums, let most of the lemonade spill itself down Tubby's neck.

The sun went behind a cloud, and for a single minute it was difficult to follow the leading boats without the aid of glasses. Four competitors there were now, apparently close together, more than a mile away—and the sea was running pretty heavily out there.

Then they all turned to do the last mile, running for home, and the sun shining again, and all the frenzied shoutings at the pierhead as loud as ever!

"Mercury! Mercury leads!"

"Oh, dear," Bunny sighed, "I can't see with these glasses. We're so pitching about! Which is which now—can anyone say?"

"Silver Swift is third," Tess made it.

"What! After being second!"

But the next few seconds, when all the boats were coming shorewards to finish near the pierhead, made all the difference to straining eyes that had tried to distinguish one from another. On the Morcove yacht, many an excitable shout went up as old and young alike singled out the Creel boat, dashing close behind Mercury and Astoria.

Once more the Silver Swift overhauled one of those dangerous rivals. She left the Astoria astern again and had only Mercury to beat—but with only another half mile to go!

The Last Race!

WOULD she do it—would she?

Oh, if only there could be this win at least for her!

"Oh, look—hurrah, hurrah!" all the chums aboard the yacht suddenly yelled together. "She is—winning! She's up with Mercury at last, anyway!"

"Not an inch between them," cried Mr. Willoughby, busy with his binoculars. "My word, but how she has come on these last few moments. She's ahead now—she is!"

"Girls," Bunny screamed, "hark to all the people—cheering Silver Swift! Oh, this is fine—fine! Silver Swift wins!"

"Silver Swift!" they all dinned across the sunlit waves. "Bravo, Silver Swift, you're winning!"

Then even the mad shouting of Morcove and Co. was as nothing, compared with that fierce uproar which came as the desperate race finished—and Silver Swift the winner.

Betty and Polly, in the winning boat, stood up and waved towards the Circe, and their chums waved back—jubilantly.

"Not so bad!" Bunny sparkled.

"Gorjus!" shrieked Naomer. "Hi, Tubby, where are ze chocs, bekas we want to cellerbrate?"

STILL greater was the cause for rejoicing when another half hour had passed, leaving the Silver Swift with two more wins to her credit.

She had not been beaten yet; had won the second and third events!

"Amazing!" thousands of sightseers were saying, whilst Morcove, for its part, was crazy with delight.

Came next one of the big thrills of the afternoon—a race over the measured mile from a standing start.

Turn by turn the competing speedboats showed what they could do. Some were "whacked from the start"—that standing start which was the real test for design and engine capacity. Mercury and Astoria put up a really fine showing, with hardly two seconds difference between the times checked by stop watch.

Then, last of all, Silver Swift received the signal.

In that first race she had been so slow over the first mile; but it was now obvious that Dave had been nursing her then.

This time, on the same straight mile, the speedboat's getaway was sensationally swift. Roars of cheering went up afresh even as that standing start was made, for it was realised by all that she had as good as won in those first few moments.

She streaked past the Circe, which lay alongside the course; went by with such lightning speed and such a deafening thrurr! from her engines, her well-wishers in the yacht failed to cheer. Increased amazement at the terrific capabilities of the speedboat had taken almost stupefying effect.

Quickly the official result of the race was made known. First, Silver Swift; in one minute, eighteen and a half seconds.

"Just about forty-six miles an hour, I make it," smiled Pam's father.

"Whew!"

"It makes me want to fly from here to the bungalow," Madge exclaimed quite emotionally. "To describe all this! But at any rate, Alice will be hearing the results—her father, too, unless he is sleeping through it all."

For, as Morcove knew, Mr. Willoughby had arranged for runners to take the news of any success to the bungalow the moment it was available.

"And now!" cried several of the chums, without needing to consult the programme. "Dodging the Airplane!"

"Here she comes," chuckled Tess.

Against a sky of gathering cloud an aeroplane was suddenly in view over the sea. During the couple of minutes which elapsed before the 'plane was directly overhead, all the speedboats took station for the start of the next event.

They were to move off in line, well spaced apart, and at the "Go!" each speedboat had to do its best to escape being hit by—a dropped bag of flour!

The 'plane was an Army one, specially loaned for the occasion by authorities who were taking a great interest in the speedboat contests. She could be reckoned to know her job! It would be a lively speedboat indeed, very cleverly piloted, that came through unhit.

Although the purpose of this contest was to bring out the valuable "dodging" capabilities of the speedboats, there was a comic side to it.

All the watching crowds, thinking of what it must be like to be hit by a paper bag of flour, started laughing as well as cheering as soon as the boats were off.

Nor were Betty and Polly—those long-since discovered "stowaways"—unmindful of what they might be in for now.

It was a large expanse of sea which the speedboat had been conceded—and they needed it. The 'plane, at a decreed height of not less than two thousand feet, was coming straight at them even as they all took the "Go!" And barely five

seconds later the first harmless "bombs" were dropping—plop, plop!

Misses, all of them, but some within a few inches of being hits!

Then the hunted boats had a chance to go ahead, scattering as they did so, whilst the 'plane that had gone behind had to come round in a sharp turn, to bound after them again.

Very isolated seemed the Silver Swift, of a sudden, to the two girls aboard her as passengers: far too much all by itself, with that 'plane singling them out for attack!

"Goodness!" Polly gasped, gazing upwards. "Ow, we're for it! Dave—dodge somehow! She's right above us!"

"Wow!" Jack howled his mock-dismay; and he turned up his collar. "Look out, boys!"

Plop! and again, plop!

"Missed us—hooray!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

This way, that way, darted the Silver Swift, her own engines making such a din, and yet those aboard her could hear the ugly roar-r-r! of the 'plane. Having wasted a couple of bags upon the Creel boat by dropping them only astern of her, she was now in full career to find some other victim.

And suddenly—a hit; two hits!

"Mercury—oh!" Polly yelled, for she, like Betty and Jack, had nothing to prevent them from watching how other boats fared. "Two lovely ones—all over her! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shut up laughing or you'll bring her back on us," Jack jokingly bellowed. "Told you so!" he howled as the 'plane, next instant, came at them again. "Oh, heck, look out, boys! Whallop!" as another bag of flour burst upon the water just in front of the Silver Swift's bows. "And another—"

"Eeeee!" squealed Polly, shutting her eyes.

Plop!

Then Polly opened her eyes again. Another miss—hurrah!

So, for five minutes, the fun went on. Wonderful work did the aeroplane do, scoring many a well-timed hit.

Some of the speed-boats were in a deplorable state by the time the "air raid" ended. All had been hit—the Silver Swift only once. But what a direct hit that had been, Jack receiving the bag of flour right upon his head—"wow!"

He was, of course, quite unhurt; all the same, several ounces of flour can do dreadful work with one's clothes, especially when flying sea-spray helps to turn it into paste.

There were only roars of laughter for all the sorry-looking boats, when first they came in out of the fray. Then there was more cheering for the Silver Swift, for having come off best.

Unbeaten still! And now there was the final event of the day—no laughing matter this time!

As a stern endurance test, the boats were to race one another out to a distant lightship and back to the starting-point.

The fickle spring weather was taking a bad turn now, making the final contest all the more difficult. The wind had come on to blow hard, and the sun, gone behind massing clouds that threatened rain, might not be seen again.

Only too well the Circe's occupants realised what it was going to be like for the speedboats, by the way they themselves were being bucketed about.

Betty and Polly had been given an opportunity of "quitting"; but they were remaining aboard the Silver Swift, determined to "stick it"—

especially as their added weight would be even more helpful in the rough water.

And, when at last all the lively boats were off and away through the roughening sea, those two plucky girls could be seen waving as gaily as ever, along with Jack, as the Silver Swift quickly took the lead.

The Circe cheered her and yelled its "Best of luck!"

Sky and sea darkened still more, and soon the racers were quite out of sight even to the wielders of marine glasses.

As far as fifteen miles out had the speedboats to go to get round the lightship, each fighting as best it could against the strong head wind and the leaping white-capped waves.

A squall of rain presently made sea and sky run together in one grey smear. The pelting shower reached the shore, and thousands of people fled for cover. From the Circe, the juniors could see the pierhead rails bereft of all who had crowded there.

They themselves had scarcely any protection, but they joked and laughed amongst themselves, hiding their sudden anxiety for the safety of the speedboats.

How was it with the Silver Swift now? Anxiously they wondered, when she and all her rivals were lost to sight out there on the squall-lashed sea.

Dave, her pilot—only a schoolboy, he—and the weather like this!

Morcove!

MR. WILLOUGHBY shouted that as soon as the blinding shower was past he meant to take the yacht to the pier and tie up there. Then they would land and await the return of the speedboats at the pierhead.

So, half an hour later, they finished with the yacht. From the iron gratings of the lower landing-stages, up through which the dark green waves were flopping nastily, the entire party climbed to the promenade deck.

Suddenly some of the gloom lifted from the sea. The wind, still rising, had torn apart clouds, which had spent their rain.

Even a watery gleam came back, and suddenly three of the boats at least were sighted, thrashing through the running waves.

Instantly it was shouted by people with glasses that Mercury was one, and leading; and Astoria another, a close second. As for the third, at first she could not be distinguished. Then:

"Silver Swift leads—she leads!" a dozen voices

FROM DARKEST AFRICA—

A mystery comes—out of the past—throwing its shadow over the holiday which the Morcove chums are spending by the sea. Whatever happens you **must** read next Tuesday's grand long complete story

"MORE THRILLS FOR MORCOVE!"

By Marjorie Stanton

shouted, and the jubilant cry was taken up by thousands. "Silver Swift leads!"

"Come on, the Silver Swift—come on, you'll do it!" yelled the juniors, crowding at the pierhead rails. "Dave—come on now! Hurrah, she keeps the lead! Hurrah!"

One more minute there was of terrific effort by the Creel boat and her closest rival. Then the Silver Swift was home! The race hers, and the prize, and all else that such a triumph meant for the future of her inventor!

In the stopped boat, as she flopped about in the heavy sea not a stone's throw from the pierhead, Betty and Polly bobbed up again, along with Jack. And now that all was over Dave was made to show himself to the cheering crowds.

He looked a bit pale with the strain, otherwise he was none the worse for that last thirty-mile contest with the elements.

Nor were Betty and Polly anything but wildly joyful, they and Jack bestowing admiring pattings upon Dave's shoulders.

"Every prize on the board," Bunny deliriously gurgled. "So let's call it a day!"

Which Morcove did, with the very greatest fervour!

AND so, after all, "Cranky Creel" was to reap the reward of inventive genius. The wireless, by giving a running commentary during the contests, had told all the world what a wonder boat the Silver Swift had proved herself to be; a speedboat embodying many novel features, the patents of which were bound to be of enormous value.

She, the child of his brain, had proved her worth! As for that other child of his—devoted, loving Alice—what a fine life he could give her in the days to come, now that fame and riches were his!

Thanks to Morcove!

[END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.]

THE SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN. No. 794. Vol. 31.

Week ending April 25th, 1936.

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My Dear Readers

THIS week I am going to print an excerpt from Cuthbert's diary—with Cuthbert's permission. It is an entry dated last Monday, and there are several pages of it:

"Angela and I decided to go for a tramp on Sunday, so we set off in the morning at about nine o'clock. It was a lovely day, and I would have given anything to dance a jig along the road. But Mrs. Hacklewort, our next-door neighbour, was looking out of her front-room window, and I just didn't dare do anything more skittish than walk.

"Angela looked very sweet when I called for her. She was wearing a sort of dark green costume with a red scarf. You'd think red and green would look terrible worn together, but then Angela looks lovely in anything.

"But her mother would insist that I take some extra mackintoshes with us. She fished out a huge old garment that had belonged to Angela's father and had about eight flap pockets in it.

"Then there was another immense thing that Angela was to cover right over herself when it rained. I should think it would have easily covered an omnibus.

"I protested against being loaded with all this extra gear, and, having visions of struggling up jagged hill-sides with a vast knapsack seeming to grow ever larger, I told Angela's mother that I had it on good authority that no rain was due to fall that day. I said I would be personally responsible for the state of the weather, and I so impressed her that she at last let us go without taking the extra macs.

"Angela and I caught a train to Box Hill and set out on our walk from there. We followed a narrow little path that went twisting up and down hill between pine-woods. It was very pleasant watching the shadows on the ground and walking on the soft pine-needles. At least, they felt soft until we sat down on them for a moment—

"About one o'clock we stopped for lunch at a quaint little inn. It was built after the Tudor style, and outside there was a huge water-butt almost overgrown with moss and ivy.

"We had a huge lunch, and Angela seemed to forget that she was what her mother calls 'a dainty eater,' for she had two helpings of everything!

"Then we sat outside on the oak benches for a while, watching some cyclists who had just arrived.

"One was a very plump young man, who had a puncture in his tyre. He complained loudly of walking up innumerable hills, and bemoaned the fact that he had left his puncture outfit at home.

"He seemed to be a very conceited person, and when someone was kind enough to lend him a repair set, he merely thanked the owner in a condescending sort of way, and then began to give everyone else a lecture on the art of repairing punctures.

"He took out a pocket-knife to lever off the tyre, and when he had finished mending the puncture he was waving the knife about in a lordly style, when, with a sudden downward swoop, he pierced the rubber and left a wide gash in it.

"I have never seen anyone look so stupid as that fat cyclist did then. He did not know what to say, and the last we saw of him he was wheeling his cycle away—a sadder and a wiser man.

"Angela and I resumed our tramp, and we were crossing a wide stretch of moorland when a large drop of water fell on my nose.

"A cold thrill of horror shot through me. I glanced up, and there was a dense black cloud over the sun. It was raining!

"Neither of us had a mac, and there was no shelter in sight. I remembered my promise to Angela's mother, and, grasping Angela's arm, I began to steer her over the moor. We seemed to have been running for miles, and I soon felt quite wet through. I took off my coat to put round Angela. At last we reached a tumbledown shed, and took shelter in there until the rain stopped.

"Luckily neither of us got very wet, but I feel as if I shall never be able to face Angela's mother again!"

Now for next week's issue!

The next magnificent Morcove story is entitled, "More Thrills for Morcove," and, incidentally, will contain more thrills for you. It concerns a strange mystery that began years ago in the African jungle—an old necklace with a queer engraving on it—and a modern circus. You simply mustn't miss reading this—Miss Marjorie Stanton's latest masterpiece!

Then the first of a new series will be starting in next week's SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN, introducing a delightful new heroine. You will love reading about "Peggy's Amazing Puzzles," by Joan Vincent. This story deals with mystery—a new, intriguing kind of mystery—mystery among weird old Druid's stones.

There will also be a further instalment of the "School for Stage Stars," and another riotously funny story of our own Harum-scarum Highness.

With best wishes,

Your Sincere Friend,

YOUR EDITOR.