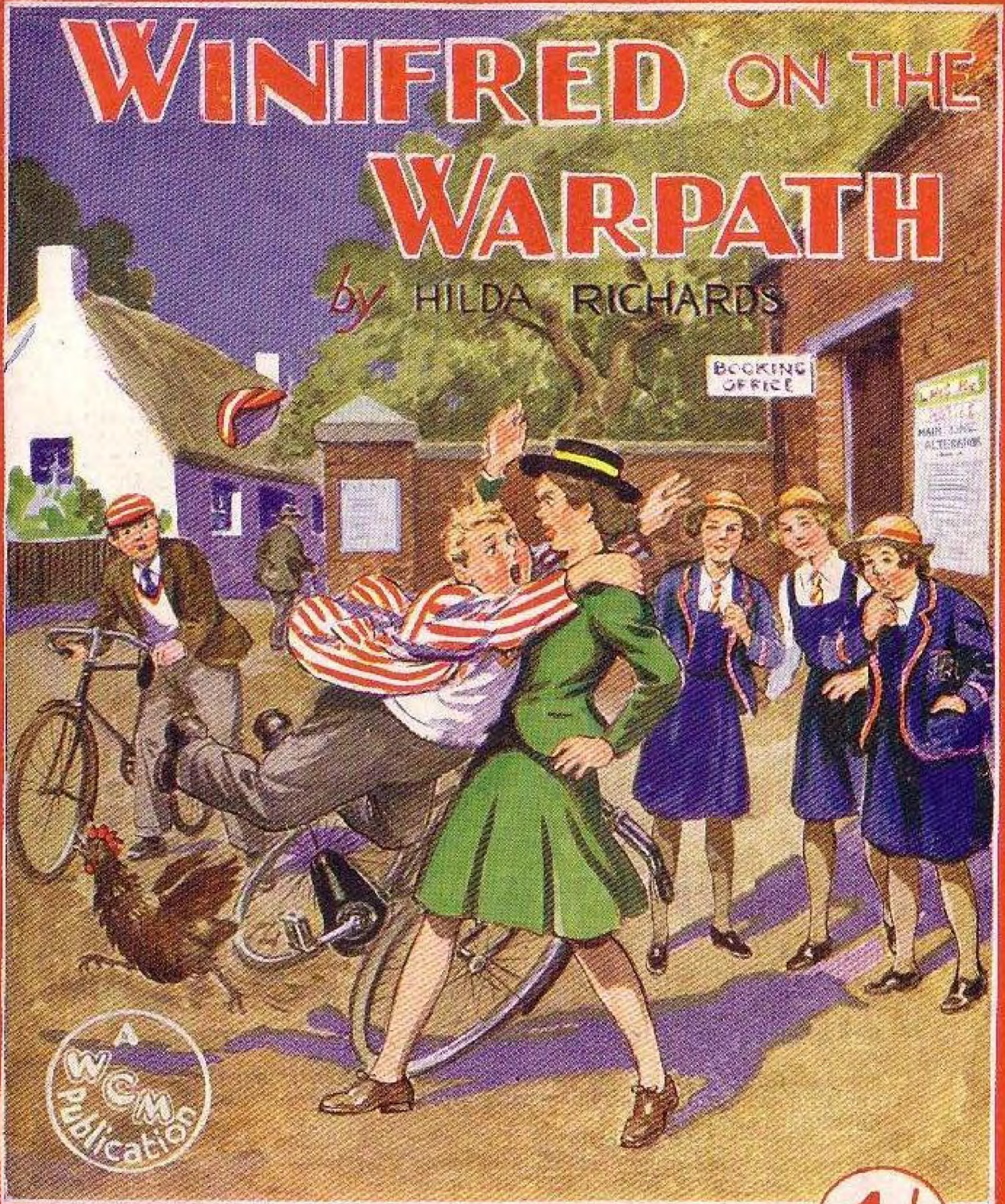


HEADLAND HOUSE SERIES N° 3

WINIFRED ON THE WAR-PATH

by HILDA RICHARDS



CRASH!

1/-

WINIFRED ON THE WAR-PATH!

By Hilda Richards

CHAPTER THE FIRST

BECKY ASKS FOR IT!

"A, ha, ha!"

"Oh, dear!"

"Becky's the limit!"

There were trills of laughter in the Lower Fifth at Headland House. Five or six girls were gathered in the doorway of No. 2 Study—and all of them seemed to be uncommonly hilarious.

Meg and Co., of the Lower Fifth, came up the staircase, and looked round, at the sounds of merriment. Margaret Ridd, Ethel Bent, and Dolly Brace were not, at the moment, looking merry and bright themselves. They had just left Miss Gadsby, their form-mistress, in the lower passage; and Miss Gadsby had been talking to Dolly on the subject of girls with untidy hair. Dolly was red and wrathful, and her pals serious and sympathetic. Dolly could no more help having untidy hair than she could help having a ladder in her stocking or a rent in her jumper. Those things just happened, where Dolly Brace was concerned. But Gaddy, who had the eye of a hawk, would never pass them unnoticed.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came from the doorway of No. 2, the study belonging to Becky Bunce and Cora Cook.

"They'll have Gaddy up, if they make that row," said Dolly, morosely. "Gaddy don't like girls to enjoy life."

"Some joke on," said Ethel, "Becky, I suppose! Perhaps she's just asked somebody how many k's there are in cat."

Meg laughed.

"Let's go and see!" she said.

And the three girls moved along to the little crowd at the doorway of No. 2.

"What's up?" asked Meg.

"Becky!" answered Jacqueline Herbert, laughing. "Look!"

Meg and Co. looked into the study. Becky Bunce was there—with a frowning brow, a spot of ink on her nose, and many spots on her fingers. She was holding up a sheet of cardboard, on which she had made a pen-and-ink drawing, with explanatory lettering under it.

Becky was no artist. There were, possibly, things that Rebecca Bunce could do. But drawing was not in the number. She had drawn a face, evidently intended as a portrait—but whose portrait it was nobody could have guessed, but for the added inscription in capital letters.

Like the ancient artist who wrote under his picture "This is an ox," in order to leave no doubt on the subject, Becky Bunce had written underneath the portrait, in sprawling capitals:

GADDY IS A MINKS.

No doubt Becky meant that Miss Gadsby was a minx. But spelling was not Becky's strong point. She spelt about as well as she drew.

"Great pip!" ejaculated Dolly Brace. "Becky, you chump, tear that up at once. If Miss Gadsby saw it——"

"She's going to see it!" snapped Becky.

"What?" gasped Meg.

"I'm going to stick it on the blackboard in the form-room."

"It's all right," chuckled Jacqueline, "Gaddy will never recognise her portrait. And she won't know what a M-I-N-K-S is."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"She's a minx!" said Becky. "Isn't she? Telling a girl to go into the House and wash!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Too bad!" said Ethel Bent, gravely. "You washed last week, didn't you, Becky?"

"The week before, more likely," said Jacqueline, "I mean, judging by appearances only——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, I've had enough from Gaddy, and now she's going to get something from me!" declared Becky. "But I haven't finished yet. Look!"

Becky dipped her pen into the ink again, and proceeded to add a striking feature to the portrait, in the shape of an extensive black moustache.

The crowd of Lower Fifth girls shrieked as they watched. Miss Gadsby, form-mistress of the Lower Fifth, was a rather masculine lady—tall, strong, powerful, hard as nails. There was no nonsense about Miss Gadsby. She had been known to take a pilfering tramp by the collar and march him to the police-station. And it was an undoubted fact that there was a hint—just a hint—of a moustache on Gaddy's upper lip. Nobody at Headland House would have dared to take notice of it, but there it undoubtedly was.

If Gaddy saw that portrait with the moustache added, it was certain that Gaddy would take it to heart, and go off at the deep end.

"There!" said Becky, throwing down the pen, "Gaddy will know herself now, even if I haven't got the likeness. She'll know her own moustache."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"For goodness' sake, Becky, destroy that nonsense at once," exclaimed Meg Ridd. "Gaddy will take you to the Head."

"She won't know I did it!" snorted Becky. "How's she to know?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the Lower Fifth girls. It had not occurred to Becky's powerful brain that she might be tracked down by her spelling. Minx, so far as Becky knew, was spelt "minks."

"I'm going to pop into the form-room when Gaddy's at a safe distance, and pin it on the blackboard!" said Becky. "She can't guess I did it——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"She'll know at once!" shrieked Dolly Brace.

"How could she know?" demanded Becky. "I'm not going to write my name on it."

"Minx is spelt with an X!" howled Dolly. "If you spell it with a K, Gaddy will know that nobody else at Headland House did it."

Becky sneered.

"You can't fool me," she retorted. "You'd like to make me spell the word wrong, I dare say. Gaddy makes out that I can't spell, and if she found wrong spelling she might think of me. You can't pull my leg, Dolly Brace."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But it's really spelt with an X, Becky," urged Meg.

"Yah!" retorted Becky.

"For goodness' sake, tear it up before it's seen. Miss Gadsby will know you did it, and she will take you to Miss Beetle——"

"She won't know."

"You might be bunked for that!" exclaimed Dolly.

"Rot! Girls ain't expelled like boys in a boys' school," said Becky, scornfully. "You can't scare me."

"There was a girl expelled from Headland House once," said Jacqueline. "It was before our time, but I've heard of it—a girl named Whishaw, I think—Winifred Whishaw——"

"Rubbish! Anyway, Gaddy won't know," said Becky. "I say, some of you go and see where the Gadfly is now. I don't want her to spot me taking this to the form-room, of course. If she saw me with it she might guess it was me."

"Oh, my summer hat!" gasped the slangy Dolly. "She might! She just might—if her brain was in first-class working order at the time."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I think we'd better take that away from Becky, and tear it up," said Jacqueline. "She might be expelled like Winifred Whishaw years ago."

"You leave it alone!" exclaimed Becky, angrily. "You touch it, and I'll pull your hair, you minx."

"Becky, do have a little sense," urged Margaret, really alarmed for Rebecca. "You can't do it! Your spelling alone gives you away."

"My spelling's all right," retorted Becky. "If you could spell as I do, you wouldn't be such a dunce, Meg Ridd. M-I-N-K-S, minx—that's right."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, we left Gaddy in the lower passage," said Ethel Bent, "if she heard this hullabaloo, she might come up——"

"Cave!" gasped Corisande Cholmondeley, suddenly, glancing out of the doorway. "Here comes Gaddy! Oh, cwumbs."

"Becky—quick——!" panted Margaret.

Miss Gadsby was coming up the passage with her long strides. There was not a second to spare. Becky had just time to get that appalling picture out of sight—if she was quick on the uptake. But Becky Bunce was not quick on the uptake or anything else.

"You can't fool me," she jeered. "I know Gaddy ain't coming! I——" Becky broke off with a gasp, as, over the heads of the crowd of girls, now scared and silent, the tall head of Miss Gadsby looked into the study. The hapless Becky stood frozen with terror, while Miss Gadsby's eyes fixed, with an awful glint in them, on the picture in Becky's hand.

CHAPTER THE SECOND

BEASTLY FOR BECKY!

MISS GADSBY did not speak.

She just gazed!

Her eyes were fixed, as if glued, on the work of art in Becky Bunce's grubby hand—the "portrait" with the extensive moustache, and the legend underneath in capitals: GADDY IS A MINKS.

The silence was awful. It could almost have been cut with a knife. Meg and Ethel, Jacqueline and Corisande, and the rest, hardly breathed—even Dolly Brace was silent. As for Becky Bunce, she was so utterly terrified by the sudden appearance and deadly glare of Miss Gadsby, that she stood petrified, as still and motionless as if turned to stone—as if Miss Gadsby's fixed gaze was as fatal as that of the fabled Medusa. It did not even occur to Becky to drop the picture—she stood with it held up for view, just as she had been standing before Gaddy happened. Her little round black eyes seemed to be popping from her face like two black currants.

Miss Gadsby broke the awful silence at last. It had not lasted many seconds, really, though to the Lower Fifth girls it seemed to have lasted an age. Gaddy's voice came like a knife.

"What is that, Rebecca?"

"Oh!" gasped Becky. "N-n-nothing, Miss Gadsby!" She bethought herself at last, and lowered the picture. "Only—"

nothing—I mean—it—it—it ain't meant for you, Miss Gadsby! Nothing of—of the kind. It—it was meant for quite another minx, Miss Gadsby."

"What?" rumbled the mistress of the Fourth. She advanced into the study. "Lay that picture on the table."

"I—I—I—I was just going to—to tear it up, Miss Gadsby," mumbled Becky. "I—I wasn't going to pin it on the blackboard in the form-room."

"Place it instantly on the table."

"Oh. Yes, Miss Gadsby."

Becky, with a trembling hand, laid the awful picture on the table. Miss Gadsby scanned it, her brows knitting more and more darkly, and the deadly glint intensifying in her eyes. The crowd of girls round the doorway watched her breathlessly. It was only too clear that stormy weather was coming.

Gaddy might have gone easy with an absurd picture that did not resemble her, and the spelling of the word "minx" in the inscription might have disarmed her. But she was not likely to go easy with the black moustache Becky had given her. That was too bitter. Everyone knew, by instinct, that Gaddy was sensitive about that. It was singular enough, perhaps, Gaddy being so man-like, so strong, so massive, wearing thick boots, and a hat, out of doors, that was so like a man's that one could hardly see any difference. It might have been supposed that she wouldn't care if people did detect a spot of moustache on her upper lip. Yet all the girls knew that she did care, and that Becky had transgressed too far for pardon. The only question was, what would Gaddy do? She could not "whop" Becky, as no doubt a form-master in a boys' school would have done. She did not look as if lines or detention would meet the case. So what was she going to do?

"I—I say," moaned the terrified Becky. "It really wasn't meant for you, Miss Gadsby! I—I'd quite forgotten you—and I—I've never noticed that you've got a moustache, Miss Gadsby——"

"Silence!" exclaimed Miss Gadsby, in a formidable voice, while the girls at the doorway almost trembled.

"I—I never, really," persisted Becky. "Never noticed it at all, and I've never said to Cora Cook that you want a shave, have I, Cora?"

Cora Cook did not answer that. The girls in the doorway faded out into the passage in consternation. Matters had been bad enough already; but Becky Bunce had put the lid on now!

Miss Gadsby gave her a look—a look that almost made the wretched Becky curl up. Gaddy was breathing very hard.

"I will not deal with you myself, Rebecca!" she said, quietly. "As this offensive insolence is directed against me, I do not feel that I can deal with it—I must place the matter in the hands of the Principal."

"Oooooh!" gasped Becky. "I—I say——"

"Miss Beetle is, at the moment, absent," pursued Miss Gadsby. "I shall place this insulting picture on her desk, in her study, to meet her eyes when she returns, Rebecca. You will take the consequences, whatever they may be."

"I—I—I never did it, Miss Gadsby!" gasped Becky.

"What?" exclaimed Miss Gadsby.

"I—I didn't! I—I found that picture in—in this study! I—I was just wondering who did it, when—when you came in——" stuttered Becky.

"You are the most untruthful girl at Headland House, Rebecca. I think you are also the most stupid, as well as the most slovenly. I hardly think that this school is suitable for you."

"Oooooh!" spluttered Becky. "I—I say——"

"But that," continued Miss Gadsby, "is for the Principal to decide. Miss Beetle will deal with you."

"I—I'd rather not go to Miss Beetle, please!" wailed Becky.
"Silence!"

Miss Gadsby picked up Becky's pen, and wrote on the card-board, in her firm hand: "This is the work of Rebecca Bunce. E. Gadsby." Then she picked up the picture.

Then, without even another glance at the wretched Becky, she strode out of the study. She went down the passage, looking neither to the right nor to the left, and apparently unconscious of startled faces that glanced at her from study doors. She swept past Meg and Co., who were on the landing, and her heavy tread went down the stairs. Meg glanced over the banisters. She saw Miss Gadsby below, with Becky's work of art gripped in her hand, turn in the direction of the Principal's study. Only too plainly, Miss Gadsby meant what she had said: she was going to leave that appalling picture on Miss Beetle's desk, to greet Miss Beetle's eyes when Miss Beetle came in.

"Poor Becky!" breathed Margaret.

"She's for it, and no mistake!" remarked Ethel Bent. "I—I wonder what the Beetle will do. Sack her, as she did Winifred Whishaw years ago?"

Dolly Brace went down the staircase, and leaned over the lower banisters. From that coign of vantage, she saw Miss Gadsby turn into the corridor where the Principal's study was situated. There could be no doubt now. Dolly's face was grave as she rejoined her friends on the landing.

"It's going to be tough for Becky!" she remarked.

"She's asked for it!" said Jacqueline. The girls were gathering outside the studies again, now that Miss Gadsby was gone.

"Begged and pwayed for it, weally," lisped Corisande Cholmondeley. "Webecca is always huntin' for twouble, you know. There never was such a twouble-hunter as Webecca."

"They can't sack a girl!" said Cora Cook. "Can't say I should be sorry to lose Becky from the study—but they can't do it."

"Gaddy looked like it!" said Mary Tredegar. "If she were Head, Becky would have been expelled on the spot."

"Poor old Becky!"

Becky Bunce came out of No. 2 Study. She was no longer looking the cheeky Becky, full of beans, who had displayed that idiotic picture in the study, and announced her intention of pinning it up on the blackboard in the form-room. She was looking woebegone, dismal, doleful.

The girls gave her sympathetic glances. Few girls at Headland House liked Becky Bunce, who was as full of knavish tricks as a monkey; who borrowed things right and left and seldom or never returned them: and who was such a fibber that it was doubtful whether she could tell the truth if she tried—not that it was on record that she ever did try. But in her present state of disaster and woe, there was plenty of sympathy. Becky was "for it": there was no mistake about that: she was up for awful trouble when Miss Beetle came in, and saw that dreadful picture: and everyone was sorry.

"I—I say, fancy that minx spotting me like that, you girls!" said Becky. "What a cat! I told her it wasn't meant for her, and she wouldn't believe me."

"But she knew it was meant for her, Becky," said Margaret Ridd, gently.

"Minx!" retorted Becky. "She ought to take a girl's word. I mean to say, it isn't as if it was you, or Ethel, or Dolly—but me, you know! Making me out to be a liar, or as good as."

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Dolly.

"Think she'll really leave it in the Beetle's study, for the old insect to see when she comes in?" asked Becky.

"She's taken it there already," answered Ethel.

"Then I'll tell you what," said Becky, eagerly. "The Beetle won't be in yet—she's gone to Rodwood——"

"How on earth do you know where the Head's gone?"

"I happened to hear her speak to Miss Hatch as she went out. I keep my ears open," snapped Becky.

"You do!" agreed Dolly Brace. "Is there anything that doesn't concern you that you don't know, Becky?"

"Yah!" was Becky's elegant rejoinder to that. "Look here, you girls, the Beetle can't be back for some time yet—very likely an hour or more. One of you pop into her study and bag that picture that Gaddy's left there."

"Wha-a-a-t?" ejaculated half a dozen startled voices.

"Easy as falling off a form," urged Becky. "Once the Gaddy's off the scene, who's to know? Will you go, Ethel?"

"Hardly!" answered Ethel Bent.

"You always were selfish," said Becky, crushingly. "I say, you'll go and bag that picture, won't you, Corisande?"

Corisande Cholmondeley chuckled.

"I wather think not, Webecca," she answered.

"I say, Dolly, you go!" said Becky. "You're not so selfish as that silly lipping minx Corisande."

"I am!" said Dolly, promptly. "Worse, in fact!"

"Will you go, Meg?"

Margaret Ridd shook her head. She was sorry for Becky; she was prepared to help in any way she could. But she was not prepared to raid the Head's study. To step into those sacred precincts, and "bag" the picture Miss Gadsby had left on the Principal's desk, was altogether too adventurous an enterprise for the girls of the Lower Fifth.

Becky cast round a glance of scorn.

"Lot of frightened geese," she yapped, contemptuously. "Where's the risk? You just step in, bag the picture, and bunk. No risk at all!"

"Then why not step in yourself, bag the picture, and bunk?" inquired Dolly Brace.

"Yah!" retorted Becky. That idea, apparently, did not appeal to Miss Bunce. "I say, what about you, Jacqueline?"

"Nothing about me," answered Jacqueline, laughing.

"Ethel—dear old Ethel—you'll do it, won't you? We've been jolly good friends, for whole terms, haven't we?"

"Not that I know of," answered Ethel.

"Why, you minx——" Becky drew a deep breath. "I don't think I ever saw such selfishness all round. Here I am, with the sword of Pericles over my head——"

"Oh, crumbs!" ejaculated Dolly. "Do you mean the sword of Damocles?"

"No, I don't!" snapped Becky. "I mean the sword of Pericles. You're ignorant, Dolly."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The sword of Pericles hanging over my head," persisted Becky, "and you all let me down all round. 'Fraid to step into the Beetle's study when the Beetle's two or three miles away! Yah!"

And Becky stalked away, with an angry and contemptuous sniff. But that angry and contemptuous sniff had no effect whatever on the girls of the Lower Fifth. No one was disposed to play the part of catspaw, to pull Becky's chestnuts out of the fire: and it was clear that if anybody was going to step into the Beetle's study and bag that picture, it must be Becky herself—Becky Bunce or nobody!

CHAPTER THE THIRD

TOLD ON THE TELEPHONE!

BUZZZZZZ!

Becky Bunce jumped almost clear of the floor of the Principal's study. The sudden buzz of the telephone bell almost startled her out of her wits—such as they were.

Rebecca had made up her mind to it at last. That picture had to be abstracted from Miss Beetle's desk, before the Beetle came in. What would happen, if it met the Beetle's eyes, Becky did not know: but she knew that it would be something awful. But if it did not meet the Beetle's eyes, the outlook was brighter.

Becky was prepared to state that she had not intended the picture for Miss Gadsby: that she had intended it only as a harmless joke: and that she had not drawn the picture at all. She was, in fact, prepared to state anything that came into her head, when examined by the Beetle. But it was clear that the absence of the picture would help. If the Beetle did not see it, she would never know how awful it was. It was ever so much better for the Beetle not to see it. Nobody else being available to bag the picture, Becky, at long last, dodged into the Head's study, to bag it with her own grubby hands.

And no sooner was she inside the study, with the door safely closed, than the telephone bell buzzed.

It was fearfully disconcerting. Miss Beetle being absent, the buzz of the telephone would inevitably bring the Beetle's secretary to the study to take the call, for sooner or later, of course, the ring would be heard. To be discovered trespassing in that sacred study would be the last straw.

Becky was not quick on the uptake. But even Becky's dense wits enabled her to realise that nobody must come to the study while she was there. She made a bound to the telephone, and clutched the receiver off the hooks. The raucous buzz died away, to her intense relief.

She listened, with beating heart. It was not likely that a single buzz would bring Miss Finch, the secretary, to the spot. Had it continued, Finch was bound to happen. But it had stopped almost as soon as it had started. Becky listened—in deep trepidation. But there was no footstep in the corridor. Finchey wasn't coming!

"Thank goodness!" breathed Becky. She stood with the receiver in her hand, wondering what she had better do. Replacing it would probably only mean that the caller would ring again. Becky decided to speak, and "shoo" that caller off if she could.

"Hallo!" she squeaked into the mouthpiece.

"Hallo!" came back, "Winifred Whishaw speaking." "

Becky gave another jump.

Winifred Whishaw was the name Jacqueline had mentioned as that of the girl who had been expelled from Headland House years ago.

It was said in Headland House School that there had been only one expulsion in the school, since Headland House had had a local habitation and a name. It was such a drastic step that it was seldom or never taken. Boys might be expelled from Sparshott School; but girls weren't expelled from Headland House. Only once had it happened—and it had become a sort of legend in the school.

What Winifred Whishaw had done, to merit so drastic a sentence, was very vaguely known. Some said that she had set fire to the school—others that she had let off fireworks in the Sixth Form room—others that she had smacked a form-mistress's head—but nobody knew exactly. All accounts, however, agreed that Winifred had had a very bad temper, and that there had been a terrific scene at the time—though nobody could say exactly what it had been like. There were members of the Staff, doubtless, who remembered Winifred Whishaw—but none of the girls remembered her—even Edith Race of the Sixth, head-prefect and oldest of the Headland House girls, had come since Winifred had left. And the Staff never talked about the incident, at all events in the hearing of the younger generation.

So the name of Winifred Whishaw on the telephone made Becky jump. At the same time it made her curious—and Becky

was as curious and inquisitive as a jackdaw. She liked to tell the tale, in the junior common-room, and reveal knowledge that other juniors did not possess. Becky had all sorts of ways of acquiring knowledge—she could hardly have counted the keyholes to which her ear had been applied. Taking a telephone call intended for somebody else was another way of acquiring knowledge to which Miss Rebecca Bunce had no objection.

"Do you hear me?" came over the wires. "Eh! What! Winifred Whishaw speaking—got the name? Winifred Whishaw! The girl you sacked, you old cat!"

"Oh, scissors!" breathed Becky.

Becky herself was no respecter of persons. But even Becky would hardly have dreamed of referring to the stately and majestic Principal of Headland House School as an "old cat." It seemed that Miss Whishaw was a young lady with a vigorous turn of expression.

"Get me?" went on the voice. It was a rather shrill voice. "Did you ever expect to hear from me again, old Beetle?"

"Oh! Yes—no!" murmured Becky into the transmitter. If Miss Whishaw supposed that she was speaking to the Head, Becky was willing that she should go on supposing so. Becky had heard more than enough to whet her curiosity: and she wanted to hear more.

"Oh, you're there, old Beetle!" came the voice. "Good! I want to speak to you. Remember the day you sacked me?"

"Oh! Yes!" breathed Becky.

"Speak up, Beetle. You needn't whisper!" came from Miss Whishaw. "You yowled loud enough the day you pushed me out of Headland House seven years ago. Remember what I said to you?"

"Oh! No!" gasped Becky.

"I said that if you sacked me, I'd come back some day, when I was grown up, and smack your face! Remember it now?"

Becky gasped for breath. She was getting the news now—this would cause a thrill in the common-room. Nobody knew how or why Winifred Whishaw had been sacked. Becky was learning! Every ear in the common-room would hang upon her words, when she told this startling tale!

"Had you forgotten that, old Beetle?"

"Oh! No! N-n-not at all!" stammered Becky. Clearly, the lady at the other end was taking her for Miss Beetle: and Becky hoped that the lady at the other end would continue to do so. She had almost forgotten why she had come to the study, in her excitement and curiosity.

"Well, I'm coming along on Wednesday to do it!" announced Miss Whishaw.

"What!" stuttered Becky.

"Surprises you, what, old Beetle? I'm a woman of my word!" said Miss Whishaw. "I said I'd come back and smack your face, before the whole school, if you sacked me. Well, you did sack me. So I'm coming."

Becky could hardly believe her ears. She could not help thinking that, if any Headland House girl really had ever talked to the head-mistress like that, that girl could not fail to be booked for the "sack." What sort of a Headland House girl had Winifred been in her time? A tough variety, it was clear.

"What did you sack me for?" went on the voice. "Remember, old Beetle? What did I do? Smacked a girl's head. What of that? Bit old Trollope's paw when she pulled me away! Sacked—just for that!"

"Oh, crumbs!" breathed Becky. A Headland House girl who had smacked another girl's head, and bitten a mistress's hand when pulled away, must have been a very remarkable Headland House girl—quite a unique specimen. Probably there had never been another girl like Winifred Whishaw at Headland House before, or since. Winifred must have been the one and only.

Miss Trollope was still a mistress at Headland House. And that young wildcat had bitten Trollope's hand! Becky trembled with excitement! What a tale to tell to a breathless crowd in the common-room!

"Sacked!" went on Miss Whishaw. "Nice for me! Sacked from school! Sent home in disgrace! I dare say you'd forgotten it, old Beetle! Well, I hadn't! It's seven years ago! I could pick you up in one hand now, old Beetle. I could chuck Trollope across a class-room! I've developed a bit since I saw you last, old Beetle. I've been in the Service—I've seen rough times! You bet your boots, old Beetle."

Becky grinned over the telephone.

"I've been too busy to waste time on you, with the war and all," went on Miss Whishaw. "I'd have come back sooner but for that! But I'm coming now! I've got a few days off, and I'm letting you have the benefit of it! Know why I'm phoning you now? Just to give you something to think about in advance! I'm coming on Wednesday! Until then you can anticipate the pleasure of seeing me! Get me, old Beetle?"

And there was a chuckle over the wires. The amazing Miss Whishaw, evidently, was gloating over the horrid anticipations that would weigh upon Miss Beetle between Monday and Wednesday. How—if Miss Beetle had got that call—could the Principal of Headland House have dealt with so strange, so unprecedented, so unheard-of a situation? What preparations could she have made for the invasion by this vengeful Old Headlander? Miss Whishaw was giving her plenty of notice—for the mere purpose of tormenting her. Plainly Miss Whishaw was not a good-natured or forgiving young lady. No doubt she supposed that Miss Beetle, at Becky's end of the wire, was trembling in her shoes. And she was enjoying that supposition! Her chuckle told as much.

"Look out for me on Wednesday!" went on Miss Whishaw. "You'll see me all right, old Beetle. I'm on the war-path! I'm out for scalps! You're going to have a high old time on Wednesday, old Beetle. You can send for the local bobby if you like, if old Boxer is still doddering about oke. I'll lay old Boxer out fast enough if he fools around. Bank on that."

"Oh, lor!" breathed Becky. What sort of a young lady was this, who announced herself capable, and willing, to "lay out" the village policeman?

"That's about the lot!" said Winifred Whishaw, breezily. "Look out for squalls on Wednesday, old Beetle. Look out for storms! Look out for hurricanes and cyclones. Look out for earthquakes! That's the lot."

Miss Whishaw rang off.

Becky replaced the receiver, and stood grinning. If Miss Whishaw kept her word—and she sounded like a young lady who was likely to keep her word—there was going to be a sensation at Headland House on Wednesday. History was going to be made on Wednesday!

"He, he!" chuckled Becky. "Fancy old Beetle—he, he!" Then, that interesting telephone talk being over, Becky remembered why she was in the study.

She cut across to Miss Beetle's desk.

There, on top of a pile of papers, lay the drawing of Miss Gadsby, with the black moustache, and the inscription which apprised the reader that Gaddy was a "minks." Becky grabbed it up.

She crossed to the study door, opened it, listened, and then peered into the corridor. The coast was clear. Stealthily she stepped out, and closed the door after her. She tiptoed down the corridor to the corner. She had to turn into the next passage, and traverse it, to get away—and in that passage was the door of the Staff Room—the apartment where the beaks gathered in

hours of leisure. Very cautiously indeed did Becky peer round that corner.

But the passage was deserted: the door of the Staff Room closed. Becky tiptoed away, hardly breathing as she passed the door of the Staff Room. A few moments more, and all would be safe.

Alas for Becky! Even as she stole past the Staff Room door, it opened—and Miss Gadsby stepped out! Becky gave a startled squeak. Miss Gadsby stared at her, and then at the cardboard in her hand: and understood.

“Rebecca!” she exclaimed. And she made a long stride at Becky, with hand outstretched to clutch.

Becky dodged the clutch, and bolted. Miss Gadsby stared after her, blankly.

“Rebecca!” she almost shrieked. “Stop!”

Rebecca did not answer. She did not stop. She flew on to the open doorway of the House like a frightened rabbit. And Miss Gadsby, with thunder in her brow, swept after her.

CHAPTER THE FOURTH

CALLED OVER THE COALS!

MISS ASPASIA BEETLE, Principal of Headland House School, stopped dead.

She stopped and stared.

It was a stare of grim disapproval.

Miss Beetle had returned from Rodwood. She had paused in the quad to exchange a gracious word with Miss Hatch and Miss Phoot. Then she came majestically on towards the House.

Miss Beetle was not large. There was not a great deal of her. But she was majestic. One glance of her calm clear eyes, through the gold-rimmed pince-nez that gripped her Roman nose, was sufficient to quell any mutinous spirit. Sixth Form prefects regarded her with awe. The Staff breathed respect in her presence. Miss Gadsby was the only member of the Staff who was popularly supposed to be capable of standing up to the Beetle. It was said that Gaddy was the only one who had never been called into the Principal's study for a “jaw.” Yet there were rumours that the Beetle did not quite approve of Gaddy, of her man-like stride and her thick boots.

At this moment, there was no doubt, no possible probable shadow of doubt, that the Beetle did not approve of Gaddy. She stood and stared with an icy eye.

It was an unusual—indeed a remarkable—scene, that met her gaze, as she came towards the big doorway of the House. Round that doorway was collected a mob of girls of all forms. Some were laughing, all were staring. Popping out of the doorway like a cork from a bottle was the figure of Rebecca Bunce of the Lower Fifth, with a crumpled cardboard clutched in a grubby hand. Becky shot like an arrow across to the fountain in the quad, and flung the crumpled cardboard into the granite basin of water. That alone was singular enough—but the rest was startling. For, forth from the doorway, like a lion from its lair, came Gaddy—at about 60 m.p.h.

Miss Beetle could scarcely believe her eyes or her pince-nez. Repose was the motto of the Headland House staff—or should have been. Repose of manner was essential. Calmness was the key-note. Miss Beetle would almost as soon have seen a Headland House mistress smoking, as betraying emotion or excitement. The training of girls required, above all things, repose in the teacher. And Miss Gadsby, at the best of times, was a little lacking in repose. But now—

Now repose had been flung to the winds. Miss Gadsby's face was actually red. Her eyes flashed. She was moving at a

speed at which no Headland House mistress should ever have moved, except at games. She was not, perhaps, running—even Gaddy had her limit. But she was speeding—undoubtedly speeding—in pursuit of Becky Bunce, under the staring eyes of a hundred girls at least. An atom bomb could hardly have given Miss Beetle a greater shock.

Becky reached the fountain and pitched the picture into it. It was a case of any port in a storm with Becky. She could not hope to escape Gaddy's clutching hand for more than a matter of moments. There was no other means of getting rid of that awful picture, which, seen by the Principal, meant condign punishment—perhaps even following in the footsteps of Winifred Whishaw. The cardboard plunged into a foot of water.

Miss Gadsby would have arrived on the spot in time to clutch it out, but for the Principal. But, as Gaddy speeded, a voice that seemed to proceed from the depths of a refrigerator struck chillingly on her ear.

"Miss Gadsby!"

Gaddy stopped as if a shot had struck her.

Becky, at the fountain, spun round, her black beads of eyes popping at her pursuer. She gasped, at sight of the Head! That awful picture had been got rid of only in time. Now, it was true, Becky had to pay scot and lot for taking it from the Head's study. But that was not so bad—that couldn't be so serious—anything was better than letting the Beetle see that picture.

"Miss Gadsby!" repeated the Head, icily.

Gaddy's face flushed scarlet. Gaddy was generally cool and self-possessed. But she was taken quite aback now—as hopelessly aback as a ship under full sail struck by a sudden headwind.

"Oh!" she breathed. "I——"

A hundred pairs of eyes fastened upon them breathlessly. Was the Beetle going to rag Gaddy, in open quad, before half the school? There was a thrill.

But the Beetle, deeply incensed as she was by the extraordinary scene she had witnessed, had tact. Members of the Staff who were due for a "jaw" were always talked to privately within the walls of the Head's study. Nothing would have induced the Beetle to rag a mistress in public.

"Will you please come to my study with me, Miss Gadsby?" asked the Beetle, with calm dignity.

"Oh! Yes! Certainly."

They went into the House together, amid a breathless hush. But when they were gone, there was a babel of voices.

"Gaddy's for it!" said Dolly Brace.

"That little donkey Becky——" said Meg, frowning.

"Becky's in luck," remarked Ethel Bent. "That was her picture she threw into the fountain. She must have bagged it herself from the Beetle's study. There won't be much of it left by the time the Beetle's jawed Gaddy."

"Poor old Gaddy!" said Corisande Cholmondeley. "I thought the Beetle looked wather watty. I would wather not be in Gaddy's shoes just now."

"Well, Gaddy shouldn't chase about like a fag in the Fourth," remarked Dolly Brace. "Not done, you know."

"Her manners hadn't the repose that stamps the caste of Vere de Vere," remarked Ethel.

"And repose is always tops with the Beetle!" chuckled Dolly.

About a hundred other voices were talking at the same time. It was quite a buzz of excitement.

But in the Principal's study there was a chilling silence. Miss Beetle sat at her desk, motioned Miss Gadsby to a chair, and gazed at her.

According to rumour, Gadsby was the one member of the Staff who could meet the icy gaze of the Beetle without flinching. But she flinched now. Her face, which had been scarlet, had

become almost pale. She was, in fact, conscious of a fault. She had acted on impulse, in seeing Becky Bunce making off with that picture, purloined from the Head's desk. She knew that she shouldn't have. Form-mistresses ought not to act on impulse. They ought to go on their way with calm deliberation, rather like clocks. They were bound to remember that they were an example to the girls. Gaddy had forgotten that—quite forgotten it, though only for a moment. But that moment was enough.

The Beetle realised her advantage.

She had never quite been able to dominate Gaddy as she dominated the rest of the Staff. Now she had her at a loss. Gaddy had, as it were, delivered herself bound hand and foot into the enemy's hand!

The silence was prolonged. Gaddy's face flushed, and then paled again. The steady gaze of the Principal was, for once, disconcerting her, putting her out of countenance, as easily as if she had been Mademoiselle Mouton, the French mistress. She breathed hard under that pitiless gaze. But the Principal, perhaps taking mercy on her, spoke at last.

"I could not speak to you in the quadrangle, Miss Gadsby. There were other ears to hear. But now, I must say—I am surprised."

"I can explain——" began Miss Gadsby.

The Beetle raised a hand.

"Please let me finish. I am surprised—I am compelled to say, shocked. Repose of manner is most essential here. For a form-mistress to display signs of excitement in public is, I am forced to say, unprecedented. I could scarcely believe my eyes, Miss Gadsby, when I saw you rushing in pursuit of a girl of your form."

"Not rushing, Miss Beetle," said Gaddy, with some recovery of spirit, "I was hurrying a little——"

"I will not be particular about a word," said Miss Beetle. "I had the impression of rushing. I think the girls had. You were the centre of all eyes, Miss Gadsby. Many were laughing. Ridicule saps away the very foundations of respect and discipline."

Miss Gadsby breathed harder.

"May I explain?" she asked.

"No explanation can cover the extraordinary circumstances," said Miss Beetle, "but I shall hear you, of course."

"Rebecca had drawn an offensively impertinent caricature of me. I placed it here on your desk. Coming out of the Staff Room, I saw Rebecca making off with the picture in her hand. She had had the audacity to abstract it from this study."

Miss Beetle frowned.

"That is very serious," she said.

"I am glad you think so!" said Gaddy.

Miss Beetle gave her a very sharp look. She fancied she detected a note of sarcasm in Gaddy's voice. Miss Gadsby was not in a position to be sarcastic. There was acid in the Principal's voice as she rejoined:

"I shall certainly deal severely with Rebecca. But I must say to you, personally, Miss Gadsby, that what you have stated does not excuse what I saw. I have said, many times, that repose is essential here—it is a thing to be cultivated most sedulously. There has been a scene. Nothing can alter the unhappy fact that there has been a scene—a scene that will be remembered and discussed throughout the term. Headland House is no place for scenes. I take it for granted, Miss Gadsby, that in no circumstances whatever, will you ever be a party again to anything in the nature of a scene. I think I have a right to take that for granted. No doubt you will gladly give me your assurance on that point."

Miss Gadsby seemed about to choke for a moment.

"Certainly!" she managed to articulate.

"Thank you, Miss Gadsby!" said the Principal, in her most stately manner. "You may now send Rebecca to me."

Miss Gadsby hardly knew how she got out of the study under the Beetle's icy eye. She breathed hard and deep as she went down the passage. It was the first time that the Beetle had ever "combed her hair": the first time the Beetle had ever had a pretext for doing so. It had not been a pleasant process. Gaddy was angry with herself, angry with the Beetle, angry with Becky. Altogether, it was not Gaddy's happy day.

CHAPTER THE FIFTH

BECKY TELLS THE TALE

"**B**OSH!" said Dolly Brace. "Bunkum!"

Dolly always expressed herself energetically, with a touch of slanginess. But Dolly, in the expressive words "bosh" and "bunkum," expressed the general opinion of Junior Common-Room.

Becky Bunce stared, or rather glared, round her, at a crowd of laughing faces. Becky was telling the tale! And nobody believed her!

Few, indeed, ever believed Miss Rebecca Bunce. According to Dolly, Becky's statements went by contraries: if Becky said one thing, the other thing was inevitably true! And the tale Becky was now telling, was really almost incredible—even more incredible than most of Becky's imaginative romances. It was set down, not merely as one of Becky's yarns, but as the most nonsensical yarn that even Becky had ever told.

It was Tuesday: and most of the Lower Fifth were in the common-room before tea. Becky had a good audience. She expected to thrill them with what she had to tell—to fill them with delightfully excited anticipation of the morrow, when Winifred Whishaw was due to blow into Headland House on the war-path. But the Headlanders weren't thrilled. They only laughed.

"It's true!" squeaked Becky, indignantly. "I tell you, the Head's phone rang while I was in the study yesterday. I took the call."

"That sounds as if it might be true!" admitted Jacqueline Herbert. "As the call wasn't yours, it would be like you to take it."

"Minx! I had to take it, to keep Finchey from coming to the study, and finding me there. And it was Winifred Whishaw at the other end. She said she was coming to smack the Principal's face."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a burst of laughter. Really, it did sound a little stupendous. The majestic face of the stately Principal was hardly smackable, in the opinion of Headland House girls. No sane person could dream of smacking it—even in a nightmare. The thing was unimaginable—unthinkable—wildly impossible. If the Beetle's face had been smacked, it would have been time for the skies to fall—for the universe to collapse. Nobody believed a word of it.

"And I tell you I know why Whishaw was sacked," pursued Becky. "She pitched into another girl here——"

"Nonsense!" said Meg Ridd. "Go easy, Becky."

"Gammon!" said Dolly Brace.

"She did!" howled Becky. "She said so, on the phone. She said she smacked a girl's head——"

"We don't smack heads here, Becky," said Ethel Bent, laughing. "Even at Sparshott they don't smack one another's heads."

"But Winifred Whishaw did—she said so. And she said she bit Trollope's hand when Trollope pulled her off."

"Pile it on!" said Dolly Brace. "You're beating your own

record, Becky. Did she bite Trollope's hand right off? If so, old Trolley's grown a new one since."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Of course she didn't!" snapped Becky. "Just bit her hand! Must have been an awful wildcat, to bite Trolley's hand."

"Must have been, if she did it!" chuckled Pamela Hart.

"If!" grinned Dolly. "Large size in 'ifs.'"

"She said she did!" snorted Becky, "and I suppose she knows. Look here, Meg, you ask Trolley if she did."

"I can see myself asking Trolley anything of the kind," said Meg, laughing.

"Whishaw must have been in the Fourth, as that's Trolley's form," said Becky. "She's had the Fourth for ages. Does anybody know if Whishaw was in the Fourth?"

"I've heard that she was, when she was sent down," said Jacqueline. "But she didn't chew poor old Trolley, Becky. They don't bite in the Fourth—not even in the Third."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And she said that she told the Beetle that if she sacked her, she'd come back some day and smack her face!" continued Becky. "And to-morrow she's coming to do it. At least she said so."

"Stack it up!" said Dolly. "Pile it on!"

"Pelion piled on Ossa, and on Pelion Olympus!" said Jacqueline. "Don't you think you ought to have a limit when you're romancing, Becky?"

"It's true!" howled the indignant Becky.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And the Beetle doesn't know," went on Becky. "If she'd taken the call, she'd have known, and might have sent for Boxer. But she doesn't."

"They don't usually send for a policeman when an Old Headlander calls at the school!" remarked Ethel Bent, shaking her head, and there was a fresh trill of laughter at the idea.

"Whishaw said she would lay Boxer out if he fooled around," said Becky.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, it's true—all true! Whishaw's really blowing in to-morrow!" said Becky. "I'm telling you just what she said. I say, what do you think the Beetle will do if Whishaw tries to smack her face?"

"Guard with her left, I expect," said Jacqueline. The girls in the common-room fairly shrieked, at the idea of the majestic Principal guarding with her left.

"If that is going to happen to-morrow, the Beetle ought to be warned," said Ethel Bent. "She might like to keep a hockey stick in her study, ready for the visitor."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, I'm not going to tell her," declared Becky. "She's given me three detentions, because Gaddy made out that I'd drawn a caricature of her, and then pinched it from the study. She can jolly well take what's coming to her."

"You'd have got more than three detentions, if the Beetle had seen that jolly old picture," said Dolly. "Might have been bunked like Whishaw. If ever there was such a person as Whishaw!" added Dolly, dubiously.

"Of course there was, as she talked to me on the phone," snorted Becky. "She took me for the Head, and jawed away, thinking she was jawing the Beetle. And I tell you she's coming to-morrow——"

"Bow-wow!" said Dolly.

"And she was sacked for smacking a girl's head and biting Trollope——"

"Too bad!" said Ethel. "A Headland House girl ought to be allowed one free bite. Dogs are!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Less noise here!" said a voice at the doorway, as Edith Race of the Sixth, head-prefect, looked in. "You can be heard at the end of the passage." Edith glanced from one laughing face to another, and then fixed her eyes upon Becky Bunce. "You were speaking of Miss Trollope, I think, Rebecca."

"Oh, no, I wasn't," contradicted Becky, promptly.

"I heard you mention her name," said Edith, calmly. "What were you saying of Miss Trollope, Rebecca?"

Becky eyed the head-prefect uneasily. She was prepared to tell all the Lower School the thrilling news. But she was not prepared to tell a Sixth-Form prefect. That meant a report to the Beetle, if it came out that she had listened-in to a telephone-call in the Head's study.

"Well?" rapped Edith.

"I—I—I was only saying that—that—that——" stammered Becky.

"Well?" repeated Edith, inexorably.

"That—that—that Miss Trollope was—was nice!" gasped Becky. "I—I never said anything about biting her."

"Biting her!" ejaculated Edith Race, almost dazedly.

"Yes! I mean, no! Not a word!" said Becky. "I—I wouldn't. Besides, I don't know anything about it. How could I? If a girl was sacked for biting her, it was before my time, and I don't know anything about it, and I've never even heard of Winifred Whishaw. The name's quite strange to me. I've certainly never heard it, that I remember."

Edith Race gazed at her. Some of the girls noticed that she had started a little. It was possible that Edith, as the oldest inhabitant, so to speak, knew more of the story than younger Headlanders did. Edith compressed her lips.

"You are generally talking nonsense, Rebecca," she said. "Now go to your study and write fifty lines of Cæsar."

"But I never said anything," protested Becky. "I wasn't talking about Winifred Whishaw at all. Was I, Meg? You heard me."

"Oh, dear!" gasped Meg.

"I shall expect those lines before preparation, Rebecca!" said Edith, and she walked away.

Becky gave the girls in common-room an eloquent look.

"That's the sort of justice we get here," she said, bitterly. "Making a girl out to be untruthful. Me, you know!"

"You, you know!" gurgled Dolly Brace. "What could have put it into Race's head that Becky wasn't telling the truth? Anybody know?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, I'm always treated like that," said Becky. "Injustice all round. I think sometimes, what's the good of being truthful, and high-minded, and all that, and an example to other girls, when pre's and beaks don't take my word, and make me out a liar. I've a jolly good mind not to do those lines for Race."

"Better have a jollier good mind to do them!" suggested Ethel.

Snort from Becky.

"Well, I'll do them, but I jolly well hope that Winifred Whishaw will smack Race, as well as the Beetle, when she comes to-morrow."

"Just as likely to happen!" chuckled Dolly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yah!" sniffed Becky. And she departed to No. 2 Study to write Cæsar: leaving the common-room laughing.

"Can't be anything in it, can there?" said Dolly, when Becky was gone.

"Hardly," said Ethel Bent.

"Of course not," said Margaret.

"It would be a tremendous lark!" said Dolly, wistfully. "But—these gorgeous things don't happen! But——" Dolly

whistled, "what a game, if Winifred Whishaw did blow in, and——"

"She won't!" said Meg.

"No!" sighed Dolly. "I suppose she won't! It would be scrumptious if she did! But—alas—she won't!"

Which was the general opinion in the common-room. But, as a novelist would say, they little knew!

CHAPTER THE SIXTH

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING!

"THAT'S Plum!" said Dolly Brace.

And Meg and Ethel smiled.

Plum Tumpton, of Sparshott School, was on a bike. When Plum Tumpton was on a bike, almost anything might happen.

Wednesday afternoon was a half-holiday, both at Headland House and at Sparshott School. Meg and Co. were walking to Oke after dinner. Meg's brother, Reggie Ridd of the Sparshott Fourth, was coming to the village, and Meg was going to see him at the village shop. Her friends went with her, though they were not frightfully keen on seeing Reggie. Reggie was an affectionate brother only when he was hard up, as Dolly and Ethel knew, if Meg did not care to know.

Coming into the village, they sighted Reggie Ridd, in the distance, coming along on his bike. They sighted also Plum Tumpton, also coming from the direction of Sparshott, at a greater speed. Plum had, apparently, started later than Reggie, but had nearly overtaken him, when both of them dawned on the three Headland House girls.

Plum believed in speed. He liked to whiz on that bike. When Plum speeded, Plum himself, and quite a lot of other people, had narrow escapes. But it was not merely speed that appealed to Plum now. Probably he knew, or guessed, that Reggie Ridd was going to meet his sister in Oke. Plum was no pal of Reggie's—in fact, he rather loathed him: but he was deeply interested in Reggie's sister. He admired her ever so much more than Reggie did. On the occasions when Meg was in the offing, Plum was prepared to like Reggie—as much as he could.

"Oh!" exclaimed Meg, suddenly. "That clumsy Plum!" And Dolly and Ethel laughed. People often did laugh when Plum was about. He seemed born to add to the general gaiety of existence.

Plum had overtaken Reggie, still at a distance. He gave him a friendly tap on the shoulder, releasing his right hand from the handle-bar to do so.

Any other fellow could have done that without disaster. But Plum Tumpton seldom did anything at all without disaster of some kind. Why his bike wobbled into Reggie's, Plum did not know—he had not expected it to do so. But it did.

There was a howl of startled wrath from Reggie Ridd, and he strove desperately to steer clear. For a moment it looked as if they would both go to ground together. Luckily, Reggie got clear, though his machine went stumbling and wobbling in quite a frantic manner to the roadside. Plum was not so lucky. He wrenched his machine round so effectively that it curled up, went over and deposited Plum, in a sitting posture, on a dusty road.

"Oh, jiminy-whiskers!" spluttered Plum.

"You clumsy ass!" roared Reggie.

Reggie Ridd rode on, still wobbling. Plum Tumpton sat and gazed after him, with his bike curled over his legs. He staggered up at last, but by that time Reggie was a good distance ahead, sighting the Headland House girls and waving a hand to

them. Reggie could wave a hand on a bike without curling up his jigger.

"Isn't Plum a duck!" remarked Dolly. "I wonder how many bones he's broken."

"He might have made Reggie fall off!" said Margaret, frowning. "I don't think I ever saw anyone so clumsy."

Whereupon Dolly winked at Ethel, who laughed. They would not have been fearfully distressed if Reggie had taken that tumble instead of Plum. In point of fact, they thought Plum, clumsy as he was, worth at least two dozen of Reggie. However, they did not mention that to Meg.

"Hallo, who's this?" exclaimed Dolly, suddenly.

They were near the little village station. Few passengers alighted at Oke: and they were seldom strangers. Now a passenger walked out who was a stranger in the village: and Dolly's interest was at once awakened—she had not forgotten Becky Bunce's tale of the day before. True, she did not believe a word of it, any more than the other girls did. Nevertheless, she was immediately interested when a young woman, who had evidently come by train, appeared from the station.

"Eh, what?" said Meg. "What does it matter, Dolly?"

"Suppose it was the Old Headlander——!" whispered Dolly.

"What nonsense!"

But all three girls glanced at the stranger. She was a young woman of stalwart build—not tall, certainly, but thick-set and strong. Her face was rather tanned, as if her complexion had seen service in all weathers. Her eyes were sharp, a little like a hawk's. Her lips were rather thin, and set together in a hard line. Her nose was of the kind often described as pug. Her chin was prominent and aggressive. Her clothes were of a hard-wearing and practical kind, her hat was a hard, black straw, her boots strong and heavy. She looked a thoroughly capable young woman, with no nonsense about her—but she did not look a very good-tempered, amiable or patient young woman.

She glanced at the schoolgirls, and a sort of recognition came into her face. She came towards them.

"Headland House girls, what?" she asked.

"Yes," answered Meg.

"I'd know that hat anywhere," said the young woman.

"They still wear the same idiotic hat at Headland House."

"Is it idiotic?" asked Meg, mildly.

"Yes," said the young woman, "it is!" She spoke with great positiveness. "I wore it myself, and hated it. I remember kicking the rotten thing across the quad once."

The three girls caught their breath. This, then, was an old Headlander. Was it possible—could it be possible——?

"The Beetle's still Principal, I suppose?" went on the stranger.

"Miss Beetle—yes."

"Miss Beetle!" repeated the young woman. "We never called her anything but the Beetle in my time. Don't you call her the Beetle?"

"Sometimes," said Meg, smiling.

"Not when she can hear us," said Dolly. "I say, did you really belong to our school once?"

"Haven't I said so?"

"Oh! Yes! But——"

"Then there's no need to ask the question, is there?"

"Oh! No! But——!" stammered Dolly.

"I suppose Headland House girls are still the same silly sort of geese that they used to be," said the young woman. "They were a silly lot in my time. I suppose they haven't changed. Is Gaddy still there?"

"Oh! Yes."

"And frowsy old Trollope?"

"Miss Trollope—yes."

"I bit her once," said the stranger, with a chuckle. "I wonder if she remembers it. She had the cheek to grab me, and I bit her hand."

"Oh!" gasped Meg.

It was true then! Becky Bunce, for once, had been telling the truth! There really had, once upon a time, been a wildcat at Headland House. And this was she!

"I—I—I say——!" Dolly fairly gasped. "Is—is—is your name Winifred Whishaw?"

"That's my name, though I don't see how you know. They haven't got it up on the Roll of Honour at Headland, have they?" asked Miss Whishaw, sarcastically.

"Nunno! I—I think not."

"They ought to put it there," said Miss Whishaw. "I was the only girl that ever stood up to the old Beetle. I wasn't long at the school. But I made my mark there, I can tell you that. I'm going there now. First visit to the dear old show since I was hoofed out. I said I'd come back some day. Now I've come."

"Oh!" gasped Dolly, with a thrill of delicious excitement. "And you're going to the school to—to—to——!"

"To see the Beetle!" said Miss Whishaw, grimly. "Yes! Old Headlander calling on her old head-mistress! Ha, ha! Not for a quiet cup of tea and a chat in the dear old study! No!"

Reggie Ridd had arrived by this time. He had got down from his bike, and stood holding it, rather surprised to see his sister and her friends in conversation with the stranger, and impatient for it to end. Plum, having remounted his machine, was once more putting on speed, and coming up hand over fist.

Everybody but Plum noticed the village chicken that scuttled clucking across the street. Plum, of course, did not notice it till the last moment, when the absurd fowl was almost under his wheels.

Then, like the kind-hearted fellow he was, Plum wrenched round his bike, to give that wretched chicken a chance for its life. The chicken escaped, but the bike wobbled frightfully, rocking wildly, and somehow Plum lost his pedals.

What happened next was swift. Plum very nearly charged into the group of schoolgirls. He avoided them, at the cost of colliding with Miss Winifred Whishaw.

That young lady uttered a loud howl as a flying pedal established contact, apparently giving her a pain. But she forgot the pedal the next moment as Plum, rolling off the rocking bike, clutched at her for support.

Plum, to do him justice, was not given to throwing his arms round the necks of strange young women. He had never done such a thing before: and he wouldn't have done it now, if he could have helped it. But he couldn't! Miss Whishaw was the nearest object, and Plum clutched at the nearest object instinctively. The bike crashed over, and Plum was left clinging to the neck of the astonished and intensely annoyed Winifred.

"Oh, scissors!" gasped Dolly.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Reggie Ridd.

"Oh, jiminy-whiskers!" panted Plum.

Smack! smack! smack! Miss Whishaw had a large and heavy hand. She used it with promptness and despatch. She smacked Plum's head right and left, and three terrific smacks landed before poor Plum got away. He staggered away from Miss Whishaw with his head singing, quite bewildered.

"Oh! Ow! Oh!" spluttered Plum. "Wharrer you smacking my head for, I'd like to know! I couldn't help—ooogh! Ow! wow! Here, keep off."

Miss Whishaw did not seem satisfied with the punishment already inflicted. She strode at Plum, and smacked again. Twice that large and heavy hand got home, with effect, before Plum dodged to safety, yelling.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Reggie.

It was, perhaps, natural for Reggie Ridd to laugh—the scene struck him as comic. But Miss Whishaw evidently did not regard it as a laughing matter. Having disposed of Plum she turned on Reggie.

"What are you sniggering at?" she demanded. "Think it's funny? What? Perhaps you think this funny, too!" Smack! smack!

Reggie roared and dodged.

"Here, you keep off, you cat!" he yelled. "Leave me alone, you vixen. Oh, my hat! Oh, holy smoke! Gerraway."

Smack! smack! smack!

Reggie yelled and fled, leaving his bike on the ground with Plum's. Miss Whishaw, breathing hard, glared at both of them.

Meg and Co. eyed her almost in terror. They were very careful not to laugh—indeed, at that moment, they felt like anything but laughing. Luckily, Miss Whishaw saw no reason for further head-smacking. Having given the two schoolboys a deadly glare, she bestowed a nod on the schoolgirls, and walked away, taking the direction of Oke Lane—evidently heading for Headland House. Meg and Co. breathed more freely when she was gone.

"What a jolly old wildcat!" murmured Dolly. "No wonder the Beetle sacked her, if she was like that at school!"

"She's going to Headland House!" breathed Ethel. "I—I wonder what's going to happen there!"

"I wonder!" said Meg.

Miss Whishaw disappeared in the distance, walking with vigorous strides. What was going to happen, when she arrived at Headland House, the schoolgirls could hardly imagine. But it was certain that something was going to happen!

CHAPTER THE SEVENTH

WINIFRED BLOWS IN!

MISS GADSBY stood in the gateway of Headland House School, looking out on a sunny road. Miss Gadsby's face, generally serene, if a little stern, lacked its accustomed serenity that afternoon.

Gaddy was still feeling the smart of her interview with the Principal.

She had been called over the coals. Her hair had been combed! Miss Gadsby, of course, would not have so described it: but that was how it was. The Beetle had as good as called her unlady-like. Gaddy did not really care two hoots about being lady-like; she believed in being strong, and fit, and healthy, and efficient. Still, it was very disagreeable. Gaddy just couldn't be prim, like Miss Trollope: or finicky, like Miss Finch; or humble and submissive, like Mademoiselle Mouton. She was quite satisfied with her own manners and customs. But she realised that she had been, as it were, caught on the wrong foot. The Beetle had been in the right in calling her to order. It was a right that the Beetle might very well have been tactful enough not to exercise. Still, there it was. Gaddy could only make up her mind, resentfully and grimly, never to give the Beetle a chance at her again.

Miss Gadsby looked out on the sunny dusty road, debating in her mind whether to go for a long walk, or to gather up Edith Race, Honoria Gale, and Florence Gunn for tennis; or to go to her study and deal with a stack of Form papers—but all the while, she was thinking of that interview in the Head's study and smarting under it. She noticed, without giving it much heed, a figure that appeared on the road, coming from the direction of Oke, with muscular strides rather like Gaddy's own.

But as the figure came nearer, Miss Gadsby started a little, and fixed her eyes intently on the pug nose, the set mouth, under the black straw hat. She had seen that face before somewhere. It called up recollections. Where had she seen that face before?

"Upon my word!" breathed Gaddy, suddenly.

She remembered! That face was years older than when she had seen it last—seven years older, to be precise. But except that it was older, it had not changed much. The aggressive look that adorned it now, had adorned it seven years ago, when Winifred Whishaw was a Headland House girl in Miss Trollope's form.

The girl, she remembered, had been nicknamed "the Wild-cat" in her form: and never had a nickname been more deserved. Not at all a suitable girl for Headland House—a girl with an ungovernable temper, allowed to run wild at home, and totally lacking in any sense of discipline. She had not stayed long at the school—but she had given plenty of trouble during her sojourn there—and had finally been sent away by the Principal—expelled, in fact.

Clearly, she was now coming to her old school—why, Gaddy, could only wonder. Old Headlanders, of course, frequently blew in, to call on the Head, to look round the dear old school, and so on and so forth. But a girl who had been expelled could hardly be supposed to have any kind or tender recollections of her old school; and assuredly she could not suppose that the head-mistress would be charmed to see her. So Gaddy, having recognised Miss Whishaw, was quite surprised.

"Oh, crumbs!" came a sudden exclamation, and Gaddy stared round, and discovered that Rebecca Bunce, of her Form, was also at the gateway, looking out on the road.

Miss Gadsby gave Becky a severe glance. The incident of Monday was closed: the Head had dealt with it, and that was that. But Gaddy could not feel very kindly towards the grubby junior who had drawn a caricature of her with a big black moustache. Her glance was very severe.

"Rebecca!" she rapped.

"Oh! Yes, Miss Gadsby." Becky eyed her warily.

"Your hands are very much in need of washing," said Miss Gadsby. "Go in at once and wash them, Rebecca."

Becky looked at her, with deep feelings. She was wondering whether the approaching stranger was Winifred Whishaw, and had no doubt that it was. She did not want to go in—with the fun just beginning.

"I—I say, my hands are quite clean, Miss Gadsby," she protested.

"Our ideas of cleanliness differ, Rebecca!" said Miss Gadsby, dryly. "Do at once as I tell you, or——!"

Becky did not wait for more. She flounced away from the gates, and headed for the House. Passing Jacqueline Herbert and Corisande Cholmondeley in the quad, she squeaked with excitement.

"I say, it's her!" Becky was too excited to think of grammar. She was no whale on grammar, anyway.

"What do you mean by it's her?" asked Jacqueline, politely.

"It's the Whishaw woman!" gasped Becky. "She's coming up the road! I mean to say, I'm sure it's her."

"Pewwaps you mean it is she!" suggested Corisande, gently.

"I mean it's her—Winifred Whishaw—and she'll be here in a minute—on the war-path! I say, if Gaddy tries to stop her, there'll be a row! I—I say, I wonder if they'll pull one another's hair!" gasped Becky.

Jacqueline and Corisande laughed, but they headed for the gates. Two or three other girls who had caught Becky's excited splutter followed on.

Meanwhile, Miss Gadsby stood, watching the young woman as she came. It was undoubtedly Winifred Whishaw: Gaddy remembered her quite well, and approved of her no more now

than when she had been a member of the Fourth Form at Headland House, seven years since. At the same time Gaddy was conscious of a secret amusement. Obviously this was going to be an unwelcome visitor for the Beetle, and Gaddy could not feel sorry that the Principal was going to have an unpleasant ten minutes with that utterly undesirable Old Headlander.

Miss Whishaw arrived. She gave Miss Gadsby a stare, and evidently knew her again at once.

"Skittles!" she ejaculated. "It's old Gaddy! Still here ragging the Lower Fifth, Gaddy?"

"I am still form-mistress of the Lower Fifth, if that is what you mean," said Miss Gadsby, with dignity.

"Glad to see me, old thing?"

"I cannot say that I am glad to see you, Winifred Whishaw. I should have thought that you would hardly have cared to revisit this school!" said Miss Gadsby, stiffly. "Your visit can scarcely be agreeable for anyone concerned."

"It's not intended to be agreeable, old girl!" replied Miss Whishaw.

"Kindly do not address me in such a manner!" rapped Miss Gadsby.

"I'll address you exactly how I like, Gaddy, and if you don't like it, you can lump it!" retorted the one-time Wildcat of Headland House. "Think I'm a schoolgirl now, to be jawed and put in her place? Forget it, Gaddy! Is the old cat at home?"

Miss Gadsby disdained to answer that question.

"Deaf?" asked Winifred Whishaw. "Is the Beetle in?"

"Miss Beetle, I believe, is in her study," answered Miss Gadsby, coldly.

"Has she got Boxer here?"

"Boxer!" repeated Miss Gadsby, blankly.

"The village copper! I thought she might, after I phoned yesterday to say I was coming to pay off old scores. Not that I mind! I'd lay out old Boxer as soon as I'd look at him," said Miss Whishaw, cheerfully. "In fact, I'd rather see him than not. He got after me once, when I was pinching apples in Giles's orchard, and I had to cut. I'd like to punch his fat face while I'm here."

There was a sort of gasp, from six or seven schoolgirls now gathering round the gateway. They regarded Miss Whishaw with deep and intense interest, not unmixed with alarm. Winifred was a new one on Headland House. It was difficult to believe that she had ever been a Headlander at all. The girls were realising that Becky's tale had not been, after all, without foundation. Winifred Whishaw had come back—here she was.

"Well, I'm going in to see her." Winifred's voice was loud—she had a loud voice as a gift from Nature, and saw no reason for subduing it. "I said I'd come back some day and smack her face for sacking me. Now I'm going to do it. That's me! See?"

Miss Gadsby gazed at her.

"Are you mad?" she gasped.

"No! Are you?" inquired Winifred. Her chin stuck out aggressively. "Perhaps you'd like to try and stop me? Try it on!"

Gaddy continued to gaze at her. Winifred was hefty, in her dumpling way. But the tall and powerful form-mistress of the Lower Fifth had no doubt that she could, had she chosen, have successfully barred her entrance into the precincts of the school.

But—as she bitterly reflected—Miss Beetle demanded "repose" from her Staff. She objected to scenes. She had demanded an assurance from Gaddy that she would never be guilty of another "scene." And undoubtedly there would have been a "scene"—quite an exciting one—had Gaddy tried to bar off Winifred Whishaw. "Repose" would have been conspicuous by its absence—the scene would have been terrific. Gaddy's natural loyal impulse was to stand by her Chief, and protect Miss Beetle from

this outrageous female. But the combing of her hair in the Head's study was too recent. The Beetle demanded repose and no scenes—she was going to have what she demanded, so far as Gaddy was concerned.

"Well?" hooted Winifred Whishaw. "Going to stop me, Gaddy? What?"

"It is not my business to intervene," answered Miss Gadsby, evenly. "I advise you to go away quietly——"

"I'll ask for your advice when I want it! Keep it in cold storage till then, Gaddy."

Miss Gadsby shrugged her shoulders slightly. Miss Whishaw, with a glare of defiance, swept past her, and marched in.

There was a gasp of excitement from the gathering school-girls.

"It's true!" breathed Jacqueline. "It's Winifred—and she's come."

"What a fwightful person!" murmured Corisande Cholmondeley. "Fwightful manners, and fwightful clothes. Fwightful character altogether."

"What's going to happen now?" breathed Pamela Hart.

"Goodness knows."

"I say, she's after the Beetle!" squeaked Becky Bunce. "I say, she's going to wallop the Beetle! Oh, scissors."

It spread like wildfire. On a half-holiday, all Headland House was free to look on—perhaps that was why the wicked Miss Whishaw had selected Wednesday afternoon for her call. Quite an army of girls, buzzing with excitement, gathered behind the war-like Winifred, as she marched towards the House. Never since the foundation of the school had there been such wild excitement within the walls of Headland House.

CHAPTER THE EIGHTH ON THE WAR-PATH!

"GOODNESS gracious!" ejaculated Miss Trollope, involuntarily.

Miss Aspasia Beetle gave her a cold glance.

Trolley, as she was called in her Form, was sitting in the Head's study, listening to the Head. Every now and then she was saying "Yes," or "Undoubtedly," or "Quite," or "I see that, Miss Beetle, very clearly!" Such remarks as these were all that the Principal of Headland House School required from members of her Staff.

Then, all of a sudden, Trolley ejaculated "Goodness gracious!" not at all like a prim form-mistress who had cultivated repose, but just like an ordinary human being! The Beetle's glance was, naturally, icy. She had no use whatever for impulsive ejaculations.

The fact was that the Head, sitting majestic at her desk, had her back to the study window. Trolley, sitting facing the Head, could see past the Head into the sunny quad. Trolley, therefore, could see what the Beetle couldn't see—and what she saw was quite sufficient to make the primmest form-mistress ejaculate "Goodness gracious!" Really, it would have been excusable, in the circumstances, had Trolley ejaculated "Great Scott!" or even "Great Pip!"

For what Trolley saw was nothing less than the squat, stocky figure of Winifred Whishaw advancing towards the House. Seven years had not blotted out her recollection of the member of her form who had once bitten her. Trolley had been bitten only once in her life, and it lingered in her memory. She had never expected, and assuredly never hoped, to see the "Wildcat" of Headland House again. Now she saw her.

"Miss Trollope!" said the Beetle, in freezing tones.

"Oh! Yes! I—I—!" stammered Trolley.

"I fail to interest you—to hold your attention!" said the Beetle. "I am sorry."

"Oh! No! I—I was—was startled—Winifred Whishaw——" stuttered Trolley.

"I quite fail to understand why you mention the name of the rude and obstreperous girl I was forced to expel from Headland House seven years ago," said Miss Beetle. "It is not a pleasant recollection, Miss Trollope. Neither was that person under discussion. We were discussing, unless I am in error, the Fourth Form time-table for the ensuing week——"

"Oh! Certainly! It startled me to see her!" stammered Miss Trollope. "I—I did not know she was coming here."

The Principal stared.

"Winifred Whishaw coming here!" she repeated. "Will you tell me what you mean, Miss Trollope? That young person certainly never would have the impudence to revisit Headland House. What——"

"I just saw her from the window, Miss Beetle."

"Nonsense!" said Miss Beetle, decisively.

She moved round on her swivel chair, to glance from the window. It was impossible, of course, that Winifred Whishaw could be there—apparently Miss Trollope was wandering in her mind. Such absurdity——!

Then the Head's gaze became startled, and fixed. Her rather prominent pale-blue eyes almost popped from their sockets, at the sight of a pug nose, a firm mouth, and an aggressive chin. She caught her breath.

"Good gracious!" she exclaimed—just like Trolley. "That is—is—is certainly Winifred Whishaw—I recognise her at once. She has the effrontery—the audacity—to revisit the school from which she was expelled. Can she suppose, for one moment, that I shall receive her! I shall most decidedly do nothing of the kind. Miss Trollope, oblige me by stepping out and telling that—that person that her presence here is unwelcome, and that I beg her to go at once. Add that in no circumstances whatever will I see her."

"Oh! Yes, Miss Beetle." Trolley rose, and hesitated. Trolley was prim, Trolley was well-disciplined; Trolley never dreamed of disputing a word, or a syllable, that came from the Beetle. But she hesitated now.

"Well?" said Miss Beetle, icily.

"I—I—I—I will go, certainly," stammered poor Trolley. "But—but that—that dreadful girl—she bit my hand once, Miss Beetle, and—and——"

"Nonsense! Oblige me by going at once."

"Very well, Miss Beetle."

Miss Trollope left the study. Miss Beetle, with a grim brow in which there was a trace of uneasiness, looked from the window. Perhaps she remembered the dire threat Winifred Whishaw had uttered on the day she was expelled! Certainly she was glad that it was Miss Trollope, and not her majestic self, who had to go out and "shoo" off the unwelcome visitor.

From the window she watched Miss Trollope emerge from the House. The window was partly open, and excited voices from the quad floated in. To a head-mistress who prized "repose" above everything else, the scene was extremely annoying. In the excitement of Winifred Whishaw's arrival, and of what they expected to come of it, the Headland House girls seemed to have absolutely forgotten "repose." There was no sign of "repose" anywhere in the quadrangle.

"I say, here comes Trolley!" squeaked Becky Bunce.

Miss Trollope advanced nervously to meet Winifred Whishaw. That young lady stared at her, and then nodded and grinned. Trolley's nervousness was only too evident—just as if she feared that Winifred might bite her over again!

"Hullo, Trolley, old duck!" said Winifred, cheerfully. "How's the world using you, old thing? Been sticking in the mud here all through the war? You look it! I had a job in a canteen! Topping life, Trolley! You should try it for a change. Liven you up."

"Oh! Ah! I—I——!" stammered Miss Trollope, "I—I have a message from Miss Beetle. She regrets that she cannot spare the time to see you this afternoon."

Trolley was putting it more politely than the Principal. But she had about as much nerve, in the presence of this forceful young woman, as a mouse might have had in the presence of a cat. She hoped to placate the one-time "Wildcat" of Headland House with politeness.

Winifred Whishaw simply laughed.

"Cut back and tell the old girl I'm here to see her," she said. "Tell her I've come to keep the promise I made her seven years ago."

"Oh, dear! Please go away, Winifred!" beseeched Miss Trollope. "You are making a most unseemly scene here. You must be aware of it. Please go away."

"Forget it, Trolley," said Winifred, derisively. "I'm here on business. Are you going to try to stop me going in?"

"I—I—I——Yes—no—oh, dear—I——"

"You're standing in my way," said Winifred Whishaw. "Get out of it, Trolley. You never could manage me when I was in your form. Think you could manage me now? Hook it."

"But—but—but——!"

"I said hook it!" declared Miss Whishaw, her voice rising. "When I say hook it, I mean hook it! Now, then, sharp's the word."

She advanced on Miss Trollope, with aggressive chin stuck out. Miss Trollope could as easily have stopped a locomotive as that aggressive young woman. She tottered back, side-stepped, and left a clear path for Miss Whishaw.

"You don't want another bite, what?" grinned Winifred, in passing. "Shows your sense, Trolley. You were always a fool: but you're not such a fool as you used to be. Keep clear, Trolley, and you won't get damaged."

Miss Beetle, with a pale face, leaned from the open window. What was happening was incredible—impossible—unimaginable—unthinkable! Yet it was happening! It actually was happening, there in the quadrangle, under the staring eyes of almost every girl in Headland House. Among the crowd were several Sixth Form prefects, and Miss Beetle called to them. It was a sort of last hope.

"Edith! Honoria! Florence! Kindly take that person to the gates and turn her off the premises."

"Oh!" breathed Edith Race, Honoria Gale and Florence Gunn. They looked at Miss Whishaw, and they looked at one another.

Winifred Whishaw glanced at the Head's window. Her eyes glittered at the Beetle. Seven years had not washed out her resentment of the "sack"—nor damped down the fires of her wrath.

"Oh, there you are Beetle!" she called out. "Coming, ducky! Wait a minute, and I'll be with you! You've got it coming, old Beetle."

Edith Race, as head-prefect, led her fellow-prefects to the charge. She stepped, tall and resolute, into Miss Whishaw's way.

"Please go!" said Edith, with all the stately dignity she could muster. "Please go at once."

Miss Whishaw eyed her.

"I've never seen you before," she said, "and you've never seen me before, I guess, or you wouldn't chew the rag like that."

Hop it! I haven't come here to smack little girls, and I give you a chance to hop it."

"Go away!" said Edith. "You have heard what Miss Beetle said. If you do not go away, we must remove you."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Miss Whishaw. "That's a good one! Well, if you will have it, fish-face, here it is."

Edith uttered a sudden shriek. A large hand swept at her, and a finger and thumb fastened on her nose—her handsome Greek nose. That finger and thumb compressed their grip like a vice. Edith tottered and spluttered.

"Oh! Ooogh! Led do by dose! Oooogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came in a sort of howl from scores of staring juniors. The amazing sight of a Headland House prefect having her nose pulled seemed to entertain them. They actually seemed to see something funny in it.

Honorica Gale and Florence Gunn advanced, uncertainly. A glare from Miss Whishaw's fierce eyes was enough to drive them back again. The finger and thumb relaxed their grip, and Edith clasped a hand to a scarlet nose.

"Beat it!" roared Miss Whishaw.

Edith "beat" it. She backed out of the Amazon's way in haste. Miss Whishaw's way into the House was left clear. There was a splutter of excitement in the quad as she marched in.

And Miss Aspasia Beetle, with a pale face, utterly at a loss what else to do, made a hurried rush across her study from the window to the door, and turned the key—just in time, as a heavy tread sounded in the corridor. The door-handle was turned—but the door did not open.

Thump! thump! thump!

"Go away!" articulated Miss Beetle, faintly.

Thump! thump! thump!

The dreadful visitor did not go away. She banged on the door, and banged and banged, till all Headland House rang and echoed to her banging.

CHAPTER THE NINTH

S O S

DOLLY BRACE gasped for breath, as she came in at the gates of Headland House. Meg and Ethel came in with her. The three girls had returned from Oke—wondering a good deal what might be happening at the school, and a little alarmed, though Dolly, at least, was anticipating what she called "ructions" with a thrill of happy excitement. Meg and Ethel had walked quickly—the plump little Dolly had to trot to keep pace—and they came in rather breathlessly, to find Headland House in such a state as it had never known before in its history. Becky Bunce met them with an excited squeal.

"She's come!" squealed Becky, her little black beads of eyes dancing. "She's here! I say, she pulled Race's nose."

"What?" gasped Margaret.

"Race's nose is red as fire!" chortled Becky. "Serve her right—minx! I'd like to, if she wasn't a pre! He, he! I say, the Whishaw is kicking up no end of a row in the House."

"Where's Miss Beetle?" exclaimed Ethel.

"He, he! In her study—I think she's locked the door!" Becky gurgled with glee. "The Whishaw is banging on it! You can hear her in the quad."

"Oh, scissors!" said Dolly. "Did you ever, you girls?"

"I hope she'll smack the Beetle," said Becky, grinning from one large ear to the other. "She gave me three detentions, you know. I hope the Whishaw will smack her—hard—jolly hard! I say, fancy the Head being smacked!"

"You little wretch!" said Margaret, warmly. "If Miss Beetle had had that phone call on Monday, she would have been on her guard against this. You ought not to have taken the call, and then that dreadful person would have rung again, and——"

"And she might have had Boxer here!" said Dolly.

"Well, yes, it would be a lark to see the Whishaw smacking Boxer," admitted Becky. "I'm sorry to miss that!"

"Isn't Gaddy doing anything?" asked Ethel.

"Gaddy's in her study. I wish the Whishaw would smack her too! I think she might as well, while she's about it. Gaddy told me to go in and wash—cat! I say, you can hear the banging from here—listen!"

The three girls hurried on, Becky Bunce following them chuckling. Becky, at least, was enjoying the extraordinary state of affairs at Headland House.

Margaret glanced at the window of Miss Gadsby's study. That window was open, and Gaddy could be seen within. Gaddy was seated at her table, calmly and sedately going through a pile of Form papers. From her expression, she might have been quite unconscious that anything unusual was happening in the school.

Gaddy had taken up an attitude of calm indifference. She could have handled the fiery little Whishaw with one powerful hand. She could have taken Whishaw by the back of the neck, and walked her, or carried her, out of the gates. But that would have been a "scene": and Miss Beetle objected to "scenes," and had told her so. Miss Beetle had to take the benefit of her own pronouncements. It was not for Gaddy to intervene. Gaddy sat calmly and corrected Form papers, to an accompaniment of distant banging.

Margaret paused. She could not quite understand the indifference of her form-mistress. The others—Miss Trollope, Miss Phoot, Miss Hatch, and the rest of the Staff, were not made of the stern stuff required to handle this strange situation. But Gaddy was—Gaddy, in these extraordinary circumstances, was the right woman in the right place!

"Miss Gadsby must know what is going on," said Meg, in a low voice.

"Unless she's as deaf as an oyster!" agreed Dolly.

"She jolly well knows!" chuckled Becky Bunce. "She was at the gate when the Whishaw blew in. She don't care."

"She must care," said Margaret, sharply. "I think I will speak to her at her window. Nobody else can do anything."

"Seen the Whishaw?" asked Jacqueline, coming up. "She's in the House, banging at the Beetle's door."

"The wild Whishaw's on the war-path!" said Pamela Hart. "She's scared the pre's. Seen Edith Race's nose?"

"A dreadful person!" said Corisande Cholmondeley. "I should never have believed there was such a dreadful person in existence if I had not seen her with my own eyes! Fwightful!"

Bang! bang! bang! came rumbling from the interior of the House.

"That's the Whishaw!" said Mary Tredegar. "Going strong, what?"

The Headland House girls referred to the awful visitor as "the Whishaw," as if the Whishaw had been some kind of a strange animal. And indeed she was strange enough to the Headlanders. It was hard to believe that she had ever been a Headland House girl. It was no wonder that her stay in the school had been brief.

Margaret Ridd hurried across to Miss Gadsby's window. She looked in, at the calm profile of her form-mistress.

"Miss Gadsby!" she exclaimed, breathlessly.

The mistress of the Lower Fifth glanced round.

"What is it, Margaret?"

"That dreadful woman, Miss Gadsby!" gasped Margaret. "Cannot—cannot anything be done? Cannot you hear her?"

Miss Gadsby raised her eyebrows.

"I am not Principal of Headland House, Margaret. It is for the Principal to deal with the matter. No doubt Miss Beetle knows what best to do. I am afraid there would be a scene if I intervened."

And Miss Gadsby turned back to her pile of Form papers, loftily indifferent. Margaret turned away from the window.

"Come on," said Dolly, catching her by the arm. "Let's go and see what the Whishaw is up to."

They joined a crowd of girls at the end of the Head's corridor. It was easy to see what "the Whishaw" was up to. She was still thumping on the study door with a large and heavy hand. And it was clear that her temper was not improving as she thumped.

"Will you let me in, old Beetle?" she bawled.

"No!" came a faint voice from within. "Go away! Please go away, Winifred."

"I'll watch it!" retorted the warlike Winifred. "Think I've come seventy miles by train, to go away, without smacking your phiz? Didn't I tell you I'd come back and smack you if you sacked me? I'm here to do it."

"I—I beg you to go away!"

"Oh, my eye!" jeered Winifred. "We ain't so high and haughty now, as we were seven years ago, what? You didn't beg me to go away then, old Beetle! You just hoofed me out. Rather changed your tune, what?"

"Go away! If you do not go away immediately, I shall give you in charge for creating a disturbance. I have telephoned——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Whishaw. "Old Boxer is all the police you've got in this benighted spot, and I'd double him up with one jolt! Get your Boxer, old Beetle, and see me double him up with a jolt in the bread-basket."

"What a dweadful, dweadful chawacter!" breathed Corisande Cholmondeley. "Isn't it howwid to weflect that she was once a Headland House girl! She must have detewiowated dweadfully since she left."

Thump! thump! thump!

"Are you opening this door, old Beetle?" bawled the Whishaw.

"No! Go away! Never."

"Then I'll come round to the window," snorted Winifred. "I've got a train to catch back, and I can't waste all the afternoon on you, old Beetle."

Winifred Whishaw came striding down the corridor. The crowd of girls scattered to give her a free passage. They scattered rather like a flock of geese before a mastiff. Winifred gave them a scornful snort as she passed, and tramped out into the quad. After her went the crowd—at a safe distance—buzzing with excitement.

"I say," gasped Dolly, "did you hear what the Beetle said? She's telephoned—that means the village bobby."

"He, he!" chuckled Becky Bunce. "What a lark! Fancy an old Headlander run in at Headland House by the village peeler!"

"It's not really a laughing matter, Becky," said Margaret.

"Ain't it just?" chuckled Becky. "He, he! I say, I wonder if she will punch Boxer when he comes! I'd like to see her punch Boxer."

"Oh, look!" gasped Ethel.

The Whishaw was under the Head's study window. The Head's study was on the ground floor, but the window was high up. The broad stone window-sill was about on a level with the Whishaw's head. But Winifred evidently meant business. She

gripped the window-sill with large muscular hands, and began to draw herself up.

The schoolgirls watched her breathlessly: at a further distance, a group of prefects looked on with agitated faces—and from study windows looked the faces of Miss Trollope, Miss Hatch, Miss Phoot, Mademoiselle Mouton, and other members of the Staff. Miss Gadsby, in fact, was the only one who was not looking—Gaddy continued correcting form-papers in her study, with Jove-like indifference. Laughter, shrieks, exclamations, reached her ears, and she gave no heed. Miss Gadsby was not going to participate in a "scene." Hadn't the Beetle told her, acidly, that she objected to "scenes"?

Becky gave a sudden, excited squeal.

"Here comes Boxer!"

In at the gateway of Headland House came an official figure. Police-Constable Boxer, who was the total police-force of Oke, had evidently lost no time after receiving the telephonic S O S from Headland House. Here he was, plump and ruddy, hitching up his official belt as he rolled in at the gate, armed with all the terrors of the law.

"This way, Mr. Boxer!" called out Meg.

Mr. Boxer stared blankly at the scene before his eyes. Then he rolled majestically up. Winifred, half-way to the window-sill, glanced round, and dropped back again. She knitted her brows, and breathed hard through her pug nose, as she faced up to the majesty of the law. And Mr. Boxer, knitting his brows in turn, with his severest official frown, spoke in his deepest official tones.

"Now, then! What's all this 'ere?"

CHAPTER THE TENTH

TOO MUCH FOR BOXER!

THERE was a breathless hush in the quad. Every tongue, for the moment, was silent—every eye fixed on Miss Winifred Wishaw and Police-Constable Boxer of Oke. It seemed impossible—incredible—that even the amazing Wishaw could dare to stand up in defiance of a constable in uniform. Surely, at this point, she would give in, retreat submissively, and depart—glad to escape. But she did not look like it! Her aggressive chin stuck out at Police-Constable Boxer, and her pug nose bristled with combativeness. She did not retreat—she advanced. And she snapped her fingers in the astonished and outraged face of Mr. Boxer.

"That much for you, Boxer!" she said. "Now go while the going's good. I don't want to hit you, and burst you out of your uniform. Just beat it!"

"My eye!" said Mr. Boxer, blankly.

He hitched up his belt. Mr. Boxer had an impressive way of hitching up the official belt. It struck terror to small boys, discovered in suspicious circumstances near orchards. But it failed to produce any impression whatever on Winifred Wishaw.

"Look 'ere——!" said Mr. Boxer, as majestically as he could. He was a little at a loss. Had Miss Wishaw been Mister Wishaw, Police-Constable Boxer would have handled the situation quite easily. Mr. Boxer feared no foe, if it came to that. But how to deal with a fighting female was a problem Mr. Boxer had never had to solve before. It was quite a new one on Mr. Boxer.

"Hook it!" said Winifred.

Miss Beetle's pale, harassed face appeared at the study window. Mr. Boxer glanced up at her, while keeping a wary eye on Miss Wishaw.

"Take that—that person into custody, constable!" The Headland House girls hardly recognised the Principal's tones.

No longer were they the commanding tones that Headland House had been accustomed to hear. They shook. They quavered. "Take her away, constable! In custody!"

Winifred Whishaw glared up.

"Can it, you!" she snapped. "It will take me about a minute to double up your Boxer, and then you look out for your chivvy, old Beetle."

Miss Aspasia Beetle shuddered.

"Constable——!" she said, faintly.

"I'll deal with 'er, ma'am," said Mr. Boxer, hitching his belt again. "You leave 'er to me, ma'am. I'll deal with this pusson."

"Carry on, Boxer!" said Miss Whishaw. "Waiting for you!"

"Now, you look 'ere," said Mr. Boxer, impressively—all the more impressively, because he really did not know how to handle the Whishaw. "You get out of it! See? I'm warning you to get out of these 'ere premises! If you don't get out of these 'ere premises, where you're trespassing as you very well knows, it will be my dooty to take you in charge, and 'ike you off to the cells. Now if you're a lady, ma'am, and wants to be treated as sich, you get out of 'ere, according to law."

"I'd like to see you hike me off to the cells, Boxer!" said Miss Whishaw, her chin sticking out more aggressively than ever. "I owe you one from seven years ago, when you got after me about those apples. Take your face away before I slap it."

"If you ventures, young pusson, to raise your 'and against the law!" said Mr. Boxer, sternly, "I can only say—whooo-hooooo!"

Smack!

"Oh!" gasped Margaret.

"He, he!" chuckled Becky Bunce.

Mr. Boxer staggered to port, as that hefty smack came on his right ruddy cheek. The next instant, the Whishaw's left hand smacked, on his left cheek, and he staggered to starboard. He spluttered.

"Why, you wixen——!" gurgled Mr. Boxer. "That does it! I takes you into custody for assaulting and battering the police! You come alonger me."

Mr. Boxer grabbed at the Whishaw's arm. There was a gasp of excitement from the Headland House crowd.

But the constable's grab did not catch Winifred. She eluded it easily, and grabbed in her turn. Mr. Boxer hardly knew what was happening, as an iron-like grip fastened on his tunic collar, and he was whirled off his feet. Miss Whishaw was not big, but she was evidently strong: for in her muscular grasp, Mr. Boxer spun round, his feet leaving the ground. He spun almost entirely round Winifred Whishaw, who then let go.

Bump!

Mr. Boxer smote the earth with a resounding bump that knocked every ounce of breath out of his plump body. He sat on the ground, struggling for breath, gasping like a fish out of water.

"Urrrrrrrrrggh!" was all Mr. Boxer could say, for the moment.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came in a trill of merriment from the Headland House crowd. Mr. Boxer did not see the comic side of the matter himself, but he undoubtedly looked a little comic. His mouth was open, his eyes stared like those of a codfish, and he gasped and gurgled for breath.

"That enough for you, Boxer?" asked Miss Whishaw.

"Wurrrrrgh!" gurgled Mr. Boxer. "Gurrrrrgh! Urrrgh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Call at the same address, if you want the mixture as before," said the Whishaw. "Lots more where that came from, Boxer!"

"Gurrrrrrrrggh!"

Winifred Whishaw laughed scornfully, and turned her back on the majesty of the law. Mr. Boxer could only sit and splutter. He had failed ignominiously to deal with that terrible female. He was, for the time at least, hors de combat. And the Whishaw, with no one now to say her nay, stepped back to the window-sill of the Head's study, and scrambled actively thereon.

Miss Beetle had disappeared from the window, shutting it after her. Winifred shook and rattled the window. It was fastened: but a window was easier to deal with than a door. There was a sudden smash and clatter.

"Oh, scissors!" gasped Dolly. "Look!"

The Whishaw had knocked out a pane with a hefty elbow. She reached through the gap, and unfastened the catch. A moment later, the window was dragged open, and the Whishaw disappeared into the study.

"Great pip!" breathed Dolly Brace. "What next?"

Girls crowded round the window. Some hooked themselves up by the sill to look in. The Whishaw was in the study—but she was alone there. There was no sign of Miss Beetle to be seen.

"Gone!" exclaimed Becky Bunce.

"Stole away!" murmured Ethel.

"Where's the Beetle?" came in Miss Whishaw's powerful tones. "Beat it, by gum! Hooked it while I was flooring that bobby!"

She stamped across the study to the door, and hurled it open. Many faces at the window saw her stride into the corridor and disappear. Miss Beetle, evidently, had realised that Police-Constable Boxer was but a frail reed to lean upon: and had gone while the going was good. But the Whishaw was hot on the trail. She swept down the corridor like a hurricane in chase.

There was a rush of the schoolgirls back into the House. Mr. Boxer was left, still spluttering, alone in the quad. Excitement was at fever-heat now. The Beetle had been rooted out of her study, like a fox out of its hole, and was in flight. But what refuge was there for her, within the walls of Headland House, from the vengeance of the "Wildcat" she had expelled seven years ago?

"Where's the Beetle?" The Whishaw's voice was heard on its top note. "Where's the old Beetle? Here, you—where's the Beetle?" She grabbed Weeks, the page, by the arm, and shook him. "Where's the Beetle? Sharp!"

"I—I—I dunno, mum!" stuttered Weeks.

Smack. Weeks roared.

"Think again!" snorted Miss Whishaw. "Quick—or you've got another one coming."

"Ow! Oh! Leggo! I——"

Smack!

"Oh, crikey! I—I think she went to Miss Gadsby's study!" howled Weeks. "Leggo!"

The Whishaw tossed him aside, and Weeks rolled. A crowd of girls scattered once more, as the Whishaw strode through them—heading for Miss Gadsby's study. And in wild excitement the crowd followed on.

CHAPTER THE ELEVENTH

GADDY TO THE RESCUE!

"MISS GADSBY!"

The door of Miss Gadsby's study flew open. Miss Aspasia Beetle tottered in, agitated, wild-eyed, breathless.

Miss Gadsby glanced up calmly from her pile of Form papers. She started a little, as she looked at the Principal.

Was this the majestic Beetle? This the severe-featured Principal who had "combed her hair" a few days ago because she had lacked repose? The hapless Beetle looked, at the moment, as if she had never heard the word repose, and never known what it meant. Nothing in the nature of repose was to be discerned about Miss Beetle. No fag in the Third Form had ever been seen in such a state of wild agitation.

Miss Gadsby rose to her feet, tall and calm. Perhaps there was a faintly ironic expression on her face.

"Yes, Miss Beetle," she said, with due respect.

"Help me! Save me!" Could this be the severe, majestic Beetle speaking? She leaned on Gaddy's table, and the table shook, the papers rustled, under her agitation. "Miss Gadsby—help! That dreadful female—you must be aware that Winifred Whishaw—the girl who was expelled seven years ago—is here—she has grown into a dreadful Amazon—a—a hooligan—a—a——" Words failed the hapless Beetle. She really did not know how to describe the Whishaw.

"I saw her arrive, Miss Beetle," assented the mistress of the Lower Fifth. "I thought of stopping her when she came in, but I was afraid of creating a scene."

"Could—could—could you stop her?" gasped the Beetle. "Could you control her?"

"I think I could."

"Pray do so, Miss Gadsby! Pray do your best! I am bewildered—appalled! She has—has knocked down the constable from Oke, Miss Gadsby! The wretched man can do nothing! The prefects can do nothing! Everyone is terrified of that dreadful person. Miss Gadsby, if you can do anything to put a stop to this dreadful state of affairs, pray do so—I beg you to do so."

Miss Gadsby smiled.

She had been deeply incensed. But she had a kind heart, and she could forgive. Her Chief was begging for her protection. Gaddy was ready to grant it.

"She—she has burst into my study!" moaned the Beetle. "I—I left it a—a minute or two before—but—but she—she—Hark!"

There was a heavy tramp of footsteps in the passage. Miss Beetle trembled, hurriedly circumnavigated the table, and took up a position behind the stalwart mistress of the Lower Fifth.

"Miss Gadsby! I came to you as—as my last hope! Keep her away! For mercy's sake keep that dreadful female away."

"Rely on me, Miss Beetle," said Gaddy.

She was, indeed, the last hope. Other members of the Staff had more repose—Miss Trollope, Miss Hatch, Miss Phoot, Miss Finch—but repose was absolutely useless in dealing with the Old Headlander who had come back to avenge her expulsion from the school. Muscle and determination were needed in this dire extremity: and that was where Gaddy came out strong. Muscle and determination were her long suit. She alone, in all Headland House, was capable of dealing with this unheard-of situation—which obviously could not possibly be dealt with in a reposeful or lady-like manner!

Crash! came at the door, and it flew open again. The short, thick-set, formidable figure of Winifred Whishaw appeared in the doorway. Behind her was a buzz of excited voices, and Becky Bunce's squeal was heard:

"I say, she's got the Beetle! She's got her."

"Oh! There you are, old Beetle!" Winifred Whishaw tramped in. "Come out of that corner, you old image, and take what's coming to you."

"Go away!" moaned the Beetle, faintly. "Go away!"

"I don't think!" retorted the Whishaw. "I'm after you, old Beetle! You know what I promised you the day you sacked me! It's coming now."

The Whishaw strode in. Directly in her path, like a rock, stood Miss Gadsby: tall, powerful, towering over the thick-set Whishaw. She raised her hand, in calm command.

"Go!" she said.

Miss Whishaw came to a halt. She had to do that—she could not walk through Gaddy. But she did not go. Clearly, she had no intention of going. She had, as she had said, travelled seventy miles, to administer the smacking she had promised Miss Beetle seven years ago. She was there on business: and the business was not yet transacted. She stopped—but she did not retreat—she eyed Miss Gadsby like a surly terrier eyeing a powerful mastiff.

"Get out of it, Gaddy!" she snapped.

"Go!" repeated Miss Gadsby, with undiminished calmness. "If you go away quietly now, Winifred——"

"Guess again!" jeered Winifred. "I've come here to smack the Beetle's head for sacking me! I'm going to do it! Get out of the way, before I shift you."

Miss Gadsby made no further rejoinder. She merely stood like a rock in the way: leaving the next move to the Whishaw. Girls crowded in the passage to look in at the open door. There was a sudden shriek from the whole crowd, as the Whishaw moved to the attack.

"Oh, look out, Miss Gadsby!" gasped Meg.

But Miss Gadsby was looking out. What happened next seemed to the breathless Headland House crowd like a miracle. The wild Whishaw had everyone else scared—she had handled the village constable with success—it really seemed that nothing could stop her. But now——!!

Both her wrists, somehow, came into Miss Gadsby's powerful grip. They were held, as if in a band of iron. She struggled—she wriggled—she twisted—she wrenched—she strove to free her hands. But she strove in vain. The Whishaw was strong: but Gaddy was stronger: in Gaddy's sinewy hands, she seemed little more than an infant.

Miss Gadsby did not seem even to be exerting herself. She was calm, and her breath was even, her look serene. But she held the Whishaw's wrists as if her fingers were made of iron, and the terrifying Whishaw was helpless. She was soon gasping.

"Leago!" she gurgled at last.

"Will you promise to go away quietly?" inquired Miss Gadsby.

"No! Never! I've come here to smack the Beetle!" shrieked the Whishaw. "I'm going to smack the Beetle! Didn't I promise I would? Think I've travelled seventy miles for nothing! Leago!"

"Very good," said Miss Gadsby, composedly. "You will be given in charge for trespass and a disturbance of the public peace. Come."

"Leago!" roared Winifred.

Instead of letting go, Miss Gadsby twisted both Winifred's hands behind Miss Whishaw, and gripped them there, turning Winifred's face to the door.

"Precede me!" she said, coldly.

"I won't take a step!" shrieked Winifred.

"I think you will!" said Miss Gadsby.

And Winifred did. Her hands were held behind her, and Miss Gadsby pushed. Winifred had to go.

Miss Beetle watched, gasping with relief, as Winifred was marched out of the study. Miss Gadsby was easily mistress of the situation. She handled the ferocious Whishaw like a baby. That fierce young woman marched out of the study like a lamb. The Principal of Headland House School almost wept with relief. She was saved—Gaddy had saved her—though by measures which could not by the widest stretch of the imagination be called reposeful or lady-like. But Miss Beetle was not bothering about

now. Repose was not of much practical use with the wild Whishaw about.

An army of excited girls followed the Whishaw and Miss Gadsby into the quad. Police-Constable Boxer, by that time, had regained the perpendicular. Still considerably breathless, he blinked at Miss Gadsby and the Whishaw, breathing more freely as he saw that the Whishaw was in safe hands.

Miss Gadsby called to him.

"Constable!"

"Yes, mum!" gasped Mr. Boxer.

"If you require assistance in taking this person to the station, I am prepared to render it."

"Thank you kindly, mum," said Mr. Boxer. "I'd rather you kept 'old of 'er, mum, if you don't mind. She's a 'andful, mum—more'n a 'andful."

"Very well!" said Miss Gadsby. "Come with me, constable."

"Yes, mum."

"Oh, crumbs!" breathed Dolly Brace. "She's going!"

"Going!" gasped Meg. "Thank goodness."

"Going—going—gone!" said Ethel Bent.

It really seemed too good to be true, after the wild and whirling happenings of that hectic afternoon. But it was true. The Whishaw was gone—leaving Headland House in a buzz.

CHAPTER THE TWELFTH

BECKY ASKS FOR MORE

"GADDY, old girl!" whispered Winifred.

Miss Gadsby gave the Whishaw a freezing look. She was neither so dignified nor so reposeful as the Principal of Headland House: but she did not like being addressed as "Gaddy, old girl." Her look was like ice—and her grip like a vice.

"Chuck it, old thing!" said Winifred. "Look here, you win! You've got a grip like a bulldog. You win. Chuck it."

Miss Gadsby's expression relaxed a little. She was prepared to march the war-like Winifred to the local police-station, if there was no other way of dealing with that amazing Old Headlander. But certainly she would have preferred any other way.

"Chuck it, and I'll go quietly!" said Winifred.

She was quite subdued. Miss Beetle's majestic dignity had not subdued her—neither had the majesty of the law in the person of Police-Constable Boxer. Gaddy's grip had done it. There was no doubt that Winifred Whishaw deserved her old school nickname of the "Wildcat." But the "Wildcat" knew when she had had enough.

"You will go away, and make no further disturbance at the school?" asked Miss Gadsby, quietly.

"You've said it!" agreed the Whishaw.

"Promise?" asked Miss Gadsby.

"Honour bright!" said Winifred. "Gaddy, old girl, I respect you! You're the only live human being in that crowd. I'm sorry I haven't smacked the old Beetle. But let her rip! Gaddy, your grip is to be respected, but it's jolly nearly cracking the bones in my wrists. Chuck it, and I'm through."

"I accept your word, Winifred!" said Miss Gadsby. "I trust you!"

She relaxed her grasp on the Whishaw's wrists.

"Good-bye, Gaddy!" grinned Winifred. "I may call on the Beetle again some day. But not so long as you're at Headland House! I'll wait till you've left! Ta-ta, old girl!"

"Ho!" ejaculated Police-Constable Boxer, suddenly, as Winifred Whishaw suddenly shot away in the lane. "Ho! You've let 'er go, mum! She's gorn!"

Miss Gadsby nodded, and walked back towards Headland House. Mr. Boxer mopped a perspiring brow, grunted, and felt relieved. He had had enough of the Whishaw, and he was glad that she was "gorn."

Miss Gadsby frowned, as she walked in at the school gates. She was no whale on "repose": but the state of excitement in the school was altogether too unreposeful. Girls were collected in excited groups, talking and laughing—even the prefects seemed to have forgotten that it was their duty to keep order among the juniors. Edith Race, rubbing a nose that was a very bright pink, was talking to Honoria Gale and Florence Gunn as excitedly as any junior in the Fourth. The Whishaw's raid on Headland House seemed to have thrown the whole school out of gear.

"Edith!" said Miss Gadsby, icily. "There is too much noise in the quadrangle. Please restore order."

"Oh! Yes, Miss Gadsby!" stammered Edith, her face becoming as pink as her nose. "Certainly, Miss Gadsby."

And the prefects, recalled to normal, set to work: and the excited buzz in the quad died away, as Miss Gadsby marched on into the House. She directed her steps towards the junior Common-Room, whence innumerable voices proceeded. The room was crowded with girls, apparently all talking at once. Miss Gadsby looked in with a stern brow.

"It's been a lovely afternoon!" Dolly Brace was saying.

"Oh, Dolly!" remonstrated Meg.

"Well, it has!" said Dolly. "No end of a circus. Best half-holiday this term! Isn't it, Ethel?"

"Exciting, at all events," said Ethel Bent.

"Gaddy's the goods, isn't she?" continued Dolly, quite unaware that Gaddy was at the door. "Gaddy worked the oracle! Good old Gaddy!"

"Rubbish!" squeaked Becky Bunce. "The Gadfly spoiled the whole thing. I wanted to see the Whishaw smack the Beetle. I wish she had smacked Gaddy, too!"

"Quiet, Becky!" gasped Margaret, catching sight of a face looking in at the doorway. "Quiet——!"

"Shan't!" retorted Becky, independently. "Quiet yourself! I shall jolly well say what I jolly well like. I did want to see Winifred Whishaw smack the Beetle's head, and I do wish that she had smacked Gaddy's, so yah!"

Margaret made her frantic signs to be silent. Miss Gadsby was actually stepping into the room. But Becky, having her back to the door, remained happily unaware of it, and Becky was not going to be quiet when told to be quiet by another member of the Lower Fifth—not Becky Bunce! She stared at Meg.

"What are you making faces at me for, Meg Ridd?" she inquired. "You needn't make faces at me! I'll say what I like——"

"Miss Gadsby——!" breathed Meg.

"Bother Miss Gadsby!" retorted Becky Bunce. "I'm not afraid of Gaddy like you are, and I'll say what I like, see? I jolly well wish that the Whishaw had smacked Gaddy's head, and I'd say the same if Gaddy was here, and——"

"Rebecca!"

Miss Gadsby's voice was not loud. But it was deep.

"Ooooh!" gasped Becky.

She spun round, her little black eyes popping at Miss Gadsby. The ghost of Gaddy could hardly have startled and terrified her more. There was a sudden silence in the common-room.

"Oh!" stuttered Becky. "Oh, dear! I—I wasn't speaking, Miss Gadsby—I wasn't saying a word——"

"I heard what you said, Rebecca!" said Miss Gadsby, in an awful voice. "How dare you, Rebecca!"

"I—I didn't—I—I wouldn't—I—I mean, I—I wasn't—that is, I mean I—I—I—I—oh, lor'!"

Becky had declared that she would "say the same" if Gaddy was there. But she did not seem disposed to do so, now that Gaddy was there! Very much indeed Becky didn't!

"You will go to your study, Rebecca!"

"Oh! Yes, Miss Gadsby."

"You will write five hundred lines!"

"Oh, lor'! I—I mean, yes, Miss Gadsby."

"Go."

And Rebecca went. Miss Gadsby glanced round the common-room.

"Less noise here, please!" she said.

And it was so! Winifred Whishaw had gone—and Headland House School resumed the even tenor of its way.

BUT there was one little difference.

It was noted that Miss Gadsby, from that day, was very much in the good graces of the Principal. Miss Beetle always had her most pleasant smile for Gaddy—and certainly never dreamed of "combing her hair." No doubt the Principal was grateful to Gaddy for coming to the rescue as she had done. Perhaps also she wondered whether the dreadful Winifred might reappear some day on the war-path, in which case Gaddy would be indispensable. Anyhow, Gaddy and the Head were now the best of friends—and all was calm and bright!

THE END

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