

IN THIS ISSUE: "The School in the Woods!" A SPLENDID STORY OF THE GIRLS OF MORCOVE SCHOOL.

The Schoolgirls' Own



2^D

A GALLANT RESCUE!

(An incident from the grand long complete story of the girls of Morcove School, contained in this issue.)

The First of a New Series of MORCOVE STORIES which you
 will all Thoroughly Enjoy.



“THE SCHOOL IN THE WOODS!”

A magnificent long complete story of the girls of Morcove School which tells of a deep mystery connected with a prefect, Myra Marshall.

By MARJORIE STANTON.

“Fire—Fire!”

THE chums of the Fourth Form at Morcove School had gone to sleep early that night.

A most strenuous game of hockey in the afternoon had left the girls quite played out, and even madcap Polly Linton had been too tired to tease long-suffering Paula Creel when bedtime came round.

Betty Barton said afterwards that she was actually dreaming of that hockey match when the great alarm went up.

She, the Form captain, had taken on to the hockey-field a most extraordinary team. Madge Minden was playing the piano as she kept goal! Paula Creel was continually disappearing from the field of play to change into another frock! As for Polly Linton, she kept on making the most silly proposals as to how to win the match.

There was something about a bonfire. Couldn't they light a big fire and smoke the rival team out? Smoke—lots of smoke, that was the thing!

So Betty was dreaming, in the most absurd way, when she suddenly opened her eyes and saw—smoke!

Lots of smoke, here in the Fourth Form dormitory!

She sat up with a gasp of alarm.

“My gracious!” was her whisper of dismay. “Is there a fire? Is the school on fire?”

“Yes, wather!” came a murmur that seemed to be a very apt reply. But Paula Creel was only talking in her sleep, as she turned over upon her bed.

Betty flung aside the coverings and sprang out.

Across the floor she rushed, hoping to avoid waking other sleepers for the moment. But she knocked over a chair in her excusable haste, and by the time she was at the door, peering out into the corridor, several girls were rousing up.

“Hallo! Oh, goo’ness!”

“Bai Jove, geals! What a remarkable—”

“But what does it mean? Oh, why all this smoke?” some girl, more fully awake than the others, cried out excitedly.

“Sh! Steady!” came in a soothing whisper from Betty.

Next second, however, the other girl shrielled wildly:

“Fire! Fire! Fire!”

And then, above all the sudden commotion in this particular dormitory, as every one of its occupants took alarm, there came an echo of that awful cry from other parts of the great school-house:

“Fire!”

What a state of things! At dead of night, here in the great schoolhouse, remote from any town fire-brigade—fire!

“Well, take it calmly!” cried the Form captain, as she stepped back and slammed the door to keep out the smoke. “We’ll manage!”

“Yes, wather! Howevah,” quavered Paula Creel, standing as bewildered as any, “it’s pwetty awful—what!”

“Oh, it’s frightful! We’ll all be killed!” screamed Cora Grandways, a girl who might be counted upon to fly into a panic. “Out of my way, all of you! I’m going—”

“Cora,” shouted Betty sharply, “stand still!”

“But—”

“You can’t get down the stairs.”

“What do you mean?” Cora asked hysterically, facing round at the closed door. “Is escape cut off? Oh!”

“Keep quiet! Shut that door, I tell you!”

Cora shut it again, quickly enough, after she had whipped it open a few inches and had been met by a great puff of thick smoke.

Nor was it the smoke alone that made her shut the door so violently. For the one instant that the door had been open, the lurid glow of fire, from somewhere round by the stairs, had shone into the dormitory.

The panicky girl struck her hands together and moaned. Two or three stronger-nerved girls ran to her and tried to calm her, knowing how easily she might infect others with fright. Meanwhile, the spell of utter helplessness amongst the girls in general gave place to flustered action.

Some, hardly knowing what they were about, began to dress. Others ran to the windows and peered out.

Already scores of the school’s inmates were escaping into the open air. They could be seen swarming about down below, and it was obvious that their one thought was how to help those who, like the Fourth Form girls, had found their escape cut off.

“Betty!”

“Polly dear,” the Form captain quietly answered the bosom chum who was at her elbow by the window, “I am sure we shall manage! If only they would all keep as calm as you.”

“We are wasting time!” two or three of the most frightened girls began to cry. “We can’t get away!”

And all in an instant they were at one window or another, calling wildly:

"Help—help! Save us—quick!"

"I call that silly!" Polly Linton commented loudly, hoping that her derisive words would have a bracing effect upon the panicky girls. "Just as if they don't know we need help. Paula dear—"

"Yes, Polly. Bai Jove, how are you? I mean—"

"Put on your best dressing-gown, duffer! That will give you something to do."

"Bai Jove, wather! Howevah—"

"Hurrah!" Betty suddenly sang out encouragingly. "It is all right—"

"Quite all wight!"

"They have a ladder down there. It's coming—"

"Oh, thank goodness! Let me see!" panted half a dozen of the girls. "Hurrah—yes!"

"Up, Morcove!" yelled Polly. "Never say die! Now for a jolly old slide!"

Betty shot her an admiring glance.

"Bai Jove!" said Paula, struggling into a dressing-gown that was really inside out. "What twicks some geals are! Howevah—"

"Don't forget your comb and brushes and mirror, Paula!"

"How fiviolous you are, Polly deah!"

"She's an idiot!" came in desperate tones from Cora Grandways. "Trying to be funny at a time like this! The ladder won't reach—it won't be long enough. You know it won't!"

"Cora, dry up!"

"I sha'n't!" the coward yelled at Betty. "I tell you, we are done for. Oh, hark!" was her shuddering cry of horror as the noise of the raging fire suddenly grew louder. "The door will burst down, and then—"

"That noise! Listen!" entreated Betty. "Yes, it only means that they've got to work with the school hydrant."

"Hurrah, then!" applauded Polly. "That's the stuff!"

Her intentionally flippant cry was almost lost in a great chorus from the girls at the window.

"Here's the ladder! It is going to reach. It's coming over to the wall. Yes, it does reach. Hurrah!"

With a crash, the life-saving ladder came to rest at the window; but, although many of the girls now had nerve enough to feel that they were as good as saved, with others the chance of escape became an inducement to take rash risks.

Up to now, Betty and her equally calm friends had been unable to do anything but allay panic. Now they saw the urgent need of holding in check those girls who were in peril of losing their balance and falling headlong because of their eagerness to get out by the window.

With a dart, Betty and Polly both got to the window against which the ladder was reared, and started pulling the panicky girls away.

Cora Grandways was one. With all a coward's fierce intention to be first, she had clambered to the window-sill. In her crazy excitement, she might easily have lost her balance before she had a proper hold of the ladder.

"Come back!"

"No!" she shrieked; but Betty simply dragged her away.

"Go and get some more clothes on," the Form captain ordered sternly, "and take your turn!"

"You want me to be suffocated!" Cora cried hysterically. "This smoke—"

"Rubbish! We are all right until the door goes. Now, one at a time!" Betty pleaded, turning her back upon Cora and giving her attention to the girls in general.

"Here's Bluebell Courtney," cried Polly, pushing that girl to the front. "She's one of the youngest of us."

"Down you go, then, Bluebell!" said Betty.

Spendid it was to see how calmly other girls now stood back, leaving just one or two to help Bluebell on to the ladder.

"Quick as you can, but take it easy," was Madge Minden's timely word to the girl as she began the steep descent. "Next!"

One by one the girls clambered out to the ladder in good order. There was no scramble for precedence. Some even turned back to put on more clothing, and to take away a few treasured odds and ends in a hurriedly-made-up bundle.

And yet there was need for haste, and any excitement would have been excusable.

However capably the fire was being tackled by those who had got the hydrant into play, matters seemed to be getting only worse just outside the Fourth Form dormitory door.

Louder and louder the hurly-burly of the conflagration became out there. The girls heard the crackling of burning wood, the roar of spreading flames, the fierce hissing of water into the raging furnace.

"Next!" Betty was making a point of calling, moment by moment, as she stood by the window.

"Now another! It's all right, girls; no hurry!"

Suddenly Paula came back to the window.

"Betty, deah."

"Hallo, Paula!"

"Am I quite all wight, Betty? Or would you wecommend me to wun back and get my shoes on?"

"It will give others a chance, dear—yes."

"Then I will, bai Jove!"

And Paula did!

Back she turned, and was lost to view once again in the dense smoke, whilst one by one other girls swarmed out on to the ladder.

Cora had gone by now—"and good riddance, too!" as Polly had cried.

Grace Garfield and Ella Elgood, Elsie Drew and Norah Nugent, Sybil Farlow and Eva Merrick—all these and many others had by now reached the ground in safety. There, in the glare from the fire, they could be seen mingling with girls belonging to other forms, excited groups which prefects were keeping in order.

Not a mistress was to be seen, and Betty and her chums could quite imagine that Miss Somerfield and her colleagues were all taking an active part in fighting the fire.

At last not more than five or six girls were still in peril up here in the dormitory.

Trixie Hope was one, and now she took her turn upon the ladder. Then Tess Trelawney followed, whilst after her went Dolly Delane.

"You next, Madge!" pleaded Betty. "Why, in another ten seconds we'll all be away!"

But before that short space of time had elapsed a dreadful thing happened.

The heat of the fire burst in the dormitory door.

With a dull thud, as if it had been struck by a ram, it suddenly flew open, and into the great room poured stifling clouds of smoke, shot with tongues of flame.

In a flash Betty and Polly were almost invisible to each other. A third girl still remained—and where was she?

Paula Creel—where was she?

"You next, Polly!" the Form captain shouted hoarsely through the smoke. "Do you hear me, dear? Go—"

"No! Paula— Where—"
 "I'll find her! You get away whilst you can."
 "Betty dear—"
 "We must go in turns, Polly. Don't argue!"
 That cry from Betty sounded fainter to Polly, and she knew why it was.

Betty had turned back across the smoke-packed room to find Paula. And this meant that she, Polly, had simply got to go. If she didn't, they would all three be at the ladder together.

On to the sill she scrambled, and seized the ladder by both hands. But not one rung did she descend.

She was out of the suffocating room and absolute safety awaited her below.

But Polly was not going down—not until she could see her plucky chum, the Form captain, back at the window with Paula!

Heroines Both.

IN the smothering darkness of the smoke-packed dormitory—a darkness that was only emphasised by the fitful glow from tongues of flame that licked through the doorway—Betty was trying to find Paula.

The dauntless girl had been prepared to guard against the overpowering effects of the smoke. Knowing she would be one of the last to leave the dormitory, she had drenched a towel with water, and now it was wound about the lower half of her face.

It helped wonderfully, but it meant that she could not shout a "Where are you, Paula?"

All she could do was to go right through the great room, blundering amongst the many beds and other furnishings until she came upon the missing girl.

Amidst the confusion of the smoke it was not so easy to find one's way to any special part of the room. Betty got to Paula's own bedside at last, however, and that was when the searcher became wildly alarmed.

She had hoped to find her chum there, perhaps too overcome by the smoke to take a single step towards the window. But she groped about in vain.

Where, then, in all the great room, was she to seek next?

Taking a grip upon herself, the brave girl tried to quicken the search, whilst all the time the fire seemed to be getting rapidly worse.

The heat, too—how suffocating it was, apart from the dense smoke!

Gasping for breath behind the wet muffler, she rushed this way and that, trying to miss no part of the great room; but often she felt as if she were getting too dazed to know just where she was searching.

And then suddenly she found herself almost stumbling over the missing girl!

Prone upon the floor she had found Paula, with all her senses gone from her.

How the poor girl came to be there it was impossible to guess, nor did Betty let that question claim a moment's thought. With a gasp of relief, she bent down to take the insensible girl in her arms, and then—

Oh, merciful goodness, was the human burden going to be beyond one's failing strength?

That was the appalling fear that seized Betty in this critical moment. For, when she stooped, she became very dizzy, and felt like toppling over, and when at last she did get her arms about Paula and tried to lift her, she could not.

Yet the girl's very life depended upon her

being got out of the room in the next few seconds!

Again Betty tried to lift the burden, and this time she staggered just a step or two with it. Then she gave out utterly once more.

From the direction of the window—the window, if only it could be reached!—she heard Polly shouting into the room:

"Have you found her, Betty? Betty dear, are you all right? Shall I come?"

Then Betty took the inert Paula by her shoulders and simply dragged her across the floor.

They were at the window then, but it meant no relief from the stifling heat and smoke. The flames lit the darkness with strengthening



NO ADMITTANCE! "Stand away there, please!" said the fireman to Myra Marshall. "No one is allowed inside!" Betty and Co. wondered as the prefect continued to argue.

intensity, and seemed to be traversing the whole room to find an outlet at that window.

"Betty, where are you?" Polly shouted in anxiously again, as she clung to the top of the ladder. "Oh, I must go in to her—I must! They are both overcome!"

But no!

Even as Polly, full of the same heroic spirit that had actuated her chum, was on the point of clambering back on to the sill, she made out Betty at the firelit window. Betty, with Paula clasped in her arms!

One last superhuman effort the Form captain had made to raise her insensible chum from the floor. Now she was lurching with her to the

window, and her eyes—just visible above the muffler—entreated Polly:

"Take her—take her! I can't manage any longer!"

The lightning actions with which splendid Polly answered that appeal! Betty never forgot them! For the whole of her life she would remember seeing Polly, amidst the firelit smoke, clamber into a safe position for the purpose, and then take the human burden from her.

And down there in the grounds more than a hundred pairs of eyes, peering anxiously, saw all this, too. Groans of suspense came from the watchers whilst Polly, at the risk of her own life, struggled back to the ladder, burdened the while with Paula's limp form.

But it was done at last, and what a frenzied cheer of relief went up then!

"Hurrah, she has done it! It's Polly, and she will manage now! Hurrah, Polly! Bravo—bravo!"

Those steadying the ladder at its foot held on to it harder than ever. Looking upwards, they could see it bending in and out at the middle with a violence that threatened to fling the burdened Polly from the rungs.

Down she came, however. Rung by rung, down the jolting ladder she made her way, with Paula swung safely across one shoulder. The cheering went on—raged louder than ever when Betty also was seen, coming after her chum.

"Hurrah! Bravo, the cap! Bravo, Study Twelve!" some of the excited girls preferred to call, remembering that Betty and Polly were the inseparable chums of that study.

Loud as was the school's applause for its heroes, however, there were some girls standing there who suddenly picked up a significant noise from somewhere far off in the darkness.

"Hark! Listen, all!"

And then the whole crowd heard.

Still a mile distant from the burning school, but coming along at terrific speed, were the motor fire-engines from Barncombe Town!

Their School in Ruins!

THE girls found out afterwards that the first thing Miss Somerfield had done when the midnight alarm started was to 'phone for the brigade.

Now the engines were on their way to the fire, each motor sending out blast after blast from its siren, to proclaim the fact that help was at hand.

It was the Fourth Form that had the narrowest escape. Of the other girls, many had been able to take time to dress themselves, before hurrying in perfect order down a staircase that was not involved in the conflagration.

So, naturally, these scholars now rushed to see the motor-engines turn in at the school gateway and come tearing up the wide drive. And a thrilling sight it was! All the stalwart volunteers from Barncombe, in their gleaming brass helmets, springing down as soon as the engines drew up, and getting to work without an instant's delay.

Meanwhile, stretched upon the grass was poor Paula, whom Madge and others were doing their best to revive, whilst Betty and Polly, none the worse for their frightful ordeal, simply stood by, panting for breath.

"That's better! She's pulling round now," came with a sudden sigh of relief from Madge. "Yes, stand back—give her lots of air. Paula dear—"

"Bai Jove!"

Just the thing they might have expected the aristocrat of the Fourth Form to say the moment her senses came swirling back! And Polly suddenly laughed.

"You beauty!"

"Yes, wather! Howevah—"

"She thinks she's still in bed!" Polly chuckled.

"Hi, wake up, duffer!"

Paula took that as an order to sit up. She obeyed. Then she blinked around at the firelit crowd, and her mouth fell wide open.

"Gweat goodness!" she gasped at last. "I wemember!"

"Do you really? How sweet of you!" Polly said, in the mood for some rather hysterical merriment. "But some of us wish you had 'wemembered' to be rather quicker about your dressing."

"Bai Jove—yes, wather!" faltered Paula. "Of course, I wecollect! I went back to get dswessed properly. I wather fancied there was time, don't you know, Howevah—"

"Paula," broke in Trixie gravely, "you owe your l—"

"Whoa!" sang out Polly. "None of that! Don't tell her now, anyhow. Tell her what a duffer she was to go to sleep whilst everybody else was escaping."

"How twivulous you are, Polly!" sighed the amiable aristocrat of the Fourth Form, letting two or three girls help her to her feet. "I weally did not dwop off again, you know. I had pwactically finished dressing, bai Jove, when the door blew in. And then— Bai Jove, I don't quite wecollect what happened then!"

"And you never will, and a good job, too," said Betty, regarding the fatuous but lovable Paula with an affectionate look. "The fact is, dear, you stooed back to let others go before you, and you rather overdid it."

"Weal, then, what I wish to know is, how do I come to be heah at all, bai Jove?" demanded Paula. "Pway tell me, geals! Did I have to be wewosed?"

"Don't tell her," whispered Polly imploringly.

"I wealise," said Paula, so comically that everybody laughed again, "I can hardly have awwided down that ladder of my own fwee will!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Howevah—"

"I say, look at the fire now!" was Betty's artful way of ending all talk about the thrilling rescue in which she and Polly had figured. "What a blaze!"

"Yes, wather! Gweat goodness, has the woof gone in?"

It was not as bad as that, but the chums, like all the rest of the bewildered onlookers, certainly had good cause for fearing that Morcove School by the morning would be a mere heap of smouldering ruins.

They we e not allowed to stand about, watching the never-to-be-forgotten scene. Apart from the fact that many of them were only lightly clad, there was need to get the whole school mustered, so that each mistress might make sure that all her girls were present.

But their being shepherded to the great gymnasium—a fine building, completely detached from the main block—did not prevent Betty and Co. from keeping an eye on the fire and seeing how the valiant work of fighting it went on.

Several hoses were already at work, and there was no shortage of water. From one part of the firelit grounds and another the scholars saw the rods of water flying from skilfully handled nozzles,

but whether the firemen were really making any headway it was impossible to tell.

Not until half an hour later was there a definite sign that the fire was being got under. Then, however, a change came about.

The glare of light suddenly died down, and the girls were able to believe that the black clouds that still billowed from burnt-out windows were more steam than smoke.

By that time the muster had been held, and Miss Somerfield had absolute proof that all the inmates of the school were safe and uninjured. Looking pale and exhausted, but full of joy at everybody's escape, she stood up before the strange muster in the gym.

"Girls of Morcove," she cried, rather hoarsely—"for we are still a school, although the beautiful building we all loved may not shelter us again for many a day—I thank you one and all for the commendable way in which you have behaved. There has been one brave deed done to-night, which I shall have to say a lot about when I get an opportunity."

"Hear, hear!" chorused a hundred voices, whilst Paula Creel was heard to say emphatically: "Yes, wather!"—for Paula knew by now.

"Meanwhile," the Headmistress went on quickly, "I am sure you will all make the best of things here in the gym. I must not stay; I am wanted elsewhere. But your Form-mistresses and some of the prefects will have you in charge, and will help you to settle down."

"That is all right, Miss Somerfield!" sang out some of the girls cheerily. "Don't worry about us!"

It was one of those little tokens of the school's fine spirit that always touched the heart of Miss Somerfield. She was seen to come very near to tears, whilst she smiled out upon her scholars.

"You are so splendid!" she said, with a gulp. "Well, girls, I might add just one thing before I hurry away. The gymnasium is not the only refuge. So perhaps some of you will prefer to shake down elsewhere for the rest of the night. I only ask that no girl goes off independently, but that you each look to whoever is your Form captain."

Polly Linton promptly swung round upon Betty. "Hurrah! You hear that, Betty? Then can't we go to the changing-room, next door?"

"Yes, Polly."

"Yes, wather! Bai Jove, I could do with a change!" said Paula, looking down at herself rather glumly. "What a frightful scarecrow I am!"

Nor did it console her to know that all her chums were in the same pickle, if not more so.

Without doubt, Paula Creel had a notion that she ought to have come out of that burning schoolhouse in her usual bandboxy state, with her hair "quite all wight—yes, wather!"

Some Mystery Here.

DAILY Betty Barton led her Form round to what was called the changing-room. It was part of the gymnasium building—a great room with boarded walls, the latter bearing at least a hundred coat-hooks. In the centre of the room were lockers, meant to take the scholars' belongings.

In course of time a good many garments, fallen into disuse, had accumulated in these lockers, and how handy they proved now!

"Hurrah!" Polly was suddenly shouting. "I've got a sports jacket!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Whose tennis shoes are these, I wonder?" came Tess Trelawney's gleeful remark. "Better than bedroom slippers, anyhow."

"Oui, oui—yes, yes!" responded Trixie, who still had a fancy for alleged French. "Voilà!—behold, I have found a—"

"Geals, if one of you will oblige me with a—"

"Oh, I say!" This was Bluebell Courtney. "I don't know whose old boots these are, but they fit!"

"Yes, wather! Howevah," said Paula, roaming about in a distracted manner, "if one of you geals can oblige me with a—"

"Ha, ha, ha! Look at Polly in her borrowed sports jacket!"

"Oblige me with a comb and bwush, bai Jove!"

"How's that?" yelled someone else, above the general din, after getting into some borrowed garment. "Do I look all right?"

"Quite all wight, bai Jove! Howevah, a comb and bwush—"

"Oh, someone find Paula a comb and br-r-rush!" sang out Polly. "I'm tired of hearing her shout for a comb and br-r-rush!"

But before anybody could supply Paula's urgent demand, there came an interruption—one the girls little relished.

All at once they were aware of a certain senior girl standing in the doorway. Most of the seniors at Morcove were popular with the juniors; but this particular girl was not. Myra Marshall was her name, a name that had been more than once mentioned during whispers about bullying.

"Here, less noise, some of you!" she cried sullenly, thus putting a sudden damper on the whole gleeful scene. "You ought to be getting to sleep again, you kids!"

"Sleep—it's a likely thing!" Betty laughed. "I don't see any of us getting much more sleep to-night!"

"Well, you've got to keep quiet, anyhow," Myra warned them. "I'm here to see that you do so!"

"Oh!" was the glum comment.

"Yes, and so no cheek!" snapped the prefect. "You can't do as you like with me, as you can with some of the seniors!"

"We are quite aware you are not the sport that others are!" sauced Polly. "Fancy expecting us to settle down at once—"

"When the fire isn't finished yet!" chimed in Tess.

"And I'm still waiting for that comb and bwush, bai Jove!"

Paula's remark set the girls laughing again, whilst it made Myra scowl.

"Look here," the would-be tyrant exclaimed, "no more talk! I was asked by Ethel Courtway to come and see after you, and I've got to answer for your behaviour. So just be careful!"

"Can't we have a look to see how the fire is—"

"No, you can't!"

And then, who should suddenly appear upon the scene but Ethel Courtway herself, and—oh, what a difference did her entry make!

"Hallo—hallo! What's that the girls want to do?" she asked, in her affable way.

"They as good as say they won't settle down and go to sleep," grumbled Myra. "But I tell them they have jolly well got to!"

Ethel pursed her lips for the moment. As head girl of the school, she was not so tactless



OLD ACQUAINTANCES? None of the Fourth Formers saw the secret glance that the tall, handsome woman gave to Myra Marshall—a glance that seemed to make Myra very agitated.

as to want to rebuke another prefect in front of the juniors. At the same time—

"I must say," she said at last good-humoredly, "one can hardly expect them to get to sleep again, as if nothing had happened. With only the floor to sleep on, too!"

"Yes, wather! A twisfe hard, too, pwobably!" "Why, Ethel, you told me to make the girls—" Myra burst out; but Ethel checked her with a gentle shake of the head.

"No, Myra. What I said was, would you mind seeing if there was anything you could do for their comfort. It is a bit rough on all the girls, this."

"Oh, in that case, I don't seem to be wanted at all!" Myra shrugged sulkily. "I'm sorry, but I certainly did not understand you to mean that, Ethel."

Polly waved her hand to the departing girl, and murmured: "Good-bye-ee!"

"Now, Polly!" said Ethel. She had to frown to keep herself from laughing. "Where is Betty? Oh, Betty!"—as the Form captain promptly stood forward. "There really was a misunderstanding—my fault, no doubt. The simple question is, can you all manage here until the morning?"

"Why, of course!" declared Betty. "It's topping!"

"Yes, wather! Howevah, if I might wun acowss for my bwush and comb— Oh, bai Jove, I forgot, though!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The school is pwobably in wains by this time," Paula finished, amidst the others' merriment. "Howevah, I'll get my hair to wights, somehow."

Ethel turned away to the door, laughing like the rest at the aristocrat's fatuous exclamations. She had called a cheery: "Well, good-night, girls!" when Betty ran after her to put an eager question.

"Ethel, can you tell us? We are all wondering watever we are going to do now the school is burnt out. Shall we have to go home to-morrow?"

"Oh, no!" was the airy answer which the whole crowd of girls gave ear to keenly. "Miss Somerfield has a plan; you'll hear about it in the morning. You are all to be quartered out."

"Bai Jove!"

"What!"

"Split up into different sections and quartered in unoccupied houses round about Morcoove," the head girl explained, enjoying the girls' looks of excitement. "Rather fun—eh?"

"Fun!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Hurrah!" Polly, for one, was doing a step-dance. "What a lark!"

"Well, be up with the lark in the morning!" smiled Ethel, "and then you'll hear all about it. Night-night!"

She was really off this time, the smile still playing about her lips as she took away with her a mental picture of Betty and the rest of the Fourth looking such queer guys in their makeshift toilettes.

Except for one or two girls, such as Cora Grandways, who never wanted to be liked, she loved them all—this genial, big-hearted senior, who so well deserved the proud position that was hers.

Outside the building she found Myra loitering about, obviously waiting for her.

"What was that you were saying about the girls being quartered out?" Myra asked. "What an idea—absurd!"

"Oh, I'm not so sure! Miss Somerfield made just a remark or two about it to a few of us," Ethel answered. "In the morning I quite expect that all arrangements will soon be fixed up. Miss Somerfield has a way, you know."

"But—" exclaimed Myra; she was quite agitated. "Do you mean to say that the girls will be going to—to—"

"To different houses in the neighbourhood—yes," nodded Ethel. "We know there are several of the large mansions standing empty; they have felt the 'slump.' My own opinion is that Miss Somerfield will soon arange with the estate agents for the girls to be accommodated."

"At houses like—like the Old Priory?" Myra faltered, naming one of the most ancient houses in the district. "Not at the Old Priory, surely!"

"Why not?" returned Ethel blandly. "It is, let, partly furnished, so it seems just the place."

Myra had no answer to make to this. Instead, she suddenly turned away in a manner that would have seemed markedly rude to Ethel, only Myra was not a well mannered girl even at the best of times.

Left alone in the deep darkness—for the school-house flames had been quite extinguished by this time, although the firemen were still busy—she stood very still, as if stricken with dismay.

"The Old Priory!" she said, below her breath, more than once. And then, with increasing

agitation, came this harsh whisper: "If any of the girls go there, it may ruin the whole business!"

Myra Marshall's Cunning.

ETHEL COURTWAY had been right. By the following midday the Headmistress had made all arrangements as to the disposal of the scholars.

Interviews with various estate-agents in Barncombe resulted in her renting several of the good-class mansions which were to be let or sold.

The Sixth Form were to take over a small Georgian house about a mile from the burnt-out school. The Third and Lower Third Forms were to be installed in a roomy rectory that had been crying out for a tenant for some years. The Fourth and Fifth Forms were to go to—the Old Priory!

When Betty and Co. heard this news, they were overjoyed.

They all knew the Old Priory. As a contrast from Morcove School, nothing could have been greater.

Morcove—to-day looking like a mere shell of brick and mortar, with firemen still on duty at all points of ingress—had been a fine building, standing four square to all the winds of heaven, on a great headland.

The Old Priory, by contrast, was a low-pitched, ancient house, lying in a hollow amongst wooded hills.

"We will have a time!" chuckled Polly, taking part in the excited debate. "That lovely old place, all dark and creepy—so dark, that Paula will never be able to see to do her hair! Scrumptious!"

"How frivolous you are," sighed Paula. "However, I wather gather that our school in the woods will be a wewashing novelty. Bai Jove, what wipping studies we may come in for!" "I remember going over the place once," said Madge. "There is some wonderful panelling, and there's a carved mantelpiece by Grinling Gibbons."

"Any secret passages?" asked Tess.

"That's a secret," grinned Betty.

At this point the Form captain felt a quiet nudge from Polly. It was to draw Betty's attention to the fact that Myra Marshall was going by, looking very sulky.

"She doesn't appear to have got over last night," murmured Trixie. "I say, I hope we don't get Myra for a prefect."

"Bai Jove!"

"Just what I was thinking!" exclaimed Betty, now that the girl in question was out of earshot. "The arrangement is, as you know, that Miss Massingham and Miss Redgrave are to have the assistance of a prefect, because it is expected we shall want more looking after at the Priory. But—"

"I wish we could have Ethel Courtway," said Rebell.

"Yes, wather! Geals, I have a downwight respect for Ethel, bai Jove! Without wishing to use a stwong expression, Ethel is a wipper!"

"Hear, hear!" agreed Madge and several others.

"Then suppose," cried Polly brilliantly—"suppose we go to Miss Somerfield and ask if we can have Ethel? Let's!"

But as soon as Betty demurred to this suggestion, the impulsive Polly saw what good reason there was for abandoning the idea.

Miss Somerfield had enough to do at present, without being bothered with requests for special favours. At Betty's suggestion, and with the hearty approval of all the girls, it was resolved to "take what comes."

The girls had been holding this talk just outside the undamaged gym., where they were being housed and fed for the present. As they now dispersed, Betty and a few others sauntered across the field to have yet another rather sad look at their dear old schoolhouse.

Although the fire had not raged throughout the building, water from the hydrants had done unavoidable damage, rendering the unburnt parts of the house quite uninhabitable. Gazing at the smoke-blackened façade, with all its charred window-frames, the chums could hardly believe that the building would ever be restored. It looked like having to be pulled down, and then re-built.

But, to their great joy, they had been assured that an army of builders would soon be at work; and that it was quite possible the old schoolhouse would be re-opened after the Christmas holidays. Night shifts were to be worked, if necessary, to achieve this end.

For the present, however, the damaged building was strictly out of bounds to the scholars. Firemen and a few men accustomed to salvage work were going in and out, getting away school furniture that had escaped serious damage, and the lawns were covered with stuff thus retrieved. As for any of the other scholars hoping to get a



A BULLYING PREFECT! "How dare you come to this part of the house!" Myra Marshall demanded. "The west wing is out of bounds. Just keep to your own quarters."

peep at their old studies, it was absolutely out of the question.

What was their surprise, then, when they now saw Myra Marshall prowling closer and closer to the ruined house, as if she longed to slip in unnoticed by the firemen who were doing sentry-go.

The order placing the schoolhouse out of bounds applied just as much to prefects as to other scholars.

"She only wants to show off," suggested Tess, as they watched her. "Trying to do something that will impress us with her power to go above the law."

"I am not so sure!" muttered Betty. "She is going a very slinking way about it, anyhow! Just look!"

Sure enough, Myra had seized her chance! The fireman on duty at the front porch had walked a little way to vary the monotony of standing about, and whilst his back was turned the prefect had taken a few quick, stealthy strides to enter the house.

She was almost at the porch when the man turned round and saw her.

"Hi!"

He came running back in a great state of indignation.

"Stand away, please!" he cried to the girl, with a wave of the arm. "No going in there, you know!"

"But I am a prefect!"

"Can't help that, miss. My orders are that nobody shall enter the building."

"Yes; still—"

"I can't allow you, miss," said the fireman inflexibly.

Then Betty and Co. saw Myra look more than humiliated. She stamped a foot, as if madened by the man's refusal to let her enter.

"I'm sure you can just let me go in for a few minutes. I—I want to, for a—a particular purpose."

"Sorry, miss—no!"

It was no use arguing with the man. He was obdurate. Myra turned away, not merely furious over the rebuff, but looking very uneasy.

She now noticed Betty and Co., and how they were quite openly watching her. Not a word passed, but it was clear that she would have liked to vent her anger upon the girls.

"What can there be belonging to her that she is so anxious to get hold of, if it has not been lost in the fire?" mused Tess.

"Can't imagine!" said Polly. "Surely she can trust the salvagers, as we have all got to do."

"It rather looks as if she is afraid they will find something that she doesn't want them to find," said Betty.

"Yes, wather!"

Nor was Betty far out in her reckoning, as she and her chums would have soon realised could they have known the thoughts that were passing in Myra's mind as she walked away.

She was in such an overwrought state of anxiety, at last she fell to muttering.

"If they come upon it!" she whispered to herself, in great agitation. "Oh, whatever shall I do then? How account for being in possession of it! And with those girls going to the Old Priory—finding out everything, perhaps—I shall be connected with the whole business straight away!"

She paused, heaving a desperate sigh, and looked back at the burnt building.

"Perhaps I can slip in there one night," she was thinking now. "I don't know; it may be

possible. I must try, anyhow. Oh, I mustn't let the box be found!"

Strange talk for a prefect of Morcove School to be uttering!

What was the "business" which was to be so jeopardised by a number of the scholars being quartered at the Old Priory? What was the box that she was in dread of the salvagers finding?

There was a deep mystery here—yes, indeed, if only Betty and Co. had known!

As it was, the chums hardly gave another thought to Myra's baffled attempt to enter the schoolhouse. Nor did they see anything suspicious in the fact that Myra Marshall, at her own request, was appointed to be their prefect at the Priory. They simply looked upon it as a bit of sheer hard luck!

How Myra came to be nominated for the post was soon known to all the scholars. She had gone direct to Miss Somerfield, and had asked to be appointed, pleading that she was most likely going in for the scholastic profession, and so she wanted to gain all the experience she could.

"Well, you will get experience enough if you go to the Priory with the Fourth and Fifth Forms," was Miss Somerfield's smiling remark when the request was made to her. "Naturally, conditions are going to be very different from ordinary school life. I will appoint you to the post, Myra, but try to be as tactful and reasonable as you can."

"Oh, yes! The girls won't find me hard on them."

"I hope not," said the Headmistress. "I am bound to say, however, I have sometimes noticed that you don't go the best way about handling other girls."

"I—I have wanted more authority—"

"Oh, no! Say more experience, Myra! And experience is what you will get, as I remarked just now."

A genial nod from the Headmistress concluded the interview, for Miss Somerfield had no time to waste to-day. And Myra Marshall went away, far more pleased at having got the post than she dared to show.

Only when she was quite alone did she allow her hard eyes to glitter with the exultation that was upon her.

"That's one good thing, anyway!" she breathed to herself. "I'm going with the girls to the Priory, and so I can keep my eye on them—keep them from finding out too much. If ever that business should come to light, what a frightful thing for me!"

The "business" again!

This Myra was a mystery, indeed!

Such a Nice Pair.

AT sundown that evening two char-a-bancs full of high-spirited scholars came purring downhill towards the entrance gates of the Old Priory.

Morcove School was "moving." In the first char-a-banc were Grace Garfield and all her companions of the Fifth Form. In the second were Betty and Co., and it is quite needless to say that the second vehicle was the noisier of the two!

That downhill road to the hollow where the Old Priory had snuggled for centuries on end was shut in on either side by the great woods. This was a remote spot, made up of wooded slopes, well off the beaten track, and never perhaps had the brooding silence of the place been so violently

disturbed as it was by the appearance of the scholars.

"Hip, hip!" Polly led the cheering again. She had taken care to "bag" a front seat, and was waving a flag. "Here we are, here we are, here we are again!"

"Yes, wather!"

"Who-o-er!" yelled the madcap, as the motor rocked violently upon the seldom-used roadway. "Hold tight!"

"Bai Jove!" said Paula, with what little breath was left to her. "Is my hat on stwaight? Heah, geals—"

"There's the house!" sang out Betty, as jubilant as any. "Oh, what a—"

"Perfectly gorgeous—"

"Relic!" struck in Madge Minden, with her quiet laugh.

They had obtained their first sight of the wood-embowered Priory as the motors got to the bottom of the slope and ran out upon a level stretch of road, on to which the entrance gates opened.

The first vehicle was now seen to slow down and finally pull up, just short of the gateway, and in a few seconds the Fourth Form motor was also at a standstill.

"What, have we got to walk the rest of the way?" grimaced Tess.

"Oh, bai Jove, how distwessing! Howevah—"

"Gracious, are you all too lazy?" came the scornful remark from Myra Marshall, who had ridden with the girls. "You are a fine lot to talk about roughing it for the rest of the term! Hurry up; tumble out!"

No one took any notice of these snappish words. If the girls bundled down on to the lonely road with all speed, that was only because they were full of eagerness to reach their new and romantic quarters.

"You see, miss," the driver of the second char-a-banc remarked to Betty, as he lit a cigarette, "we couldn't take big cars like these up to the house. The carriage-drive is in a shocking state, they say."

"That's all right," Betty assured him lightly. "We don't mind walking, in the least. We—"

"Now, Betty," called Myra sharply, "don't stand talking! Hurry up, all of you! Paula, what on earth are you doing?"

Paula, having taken off her hat, was running a pocket comb through her hair.

"Quite all wight, Mywa."

"It is quite all wrong! Put your hat on and take hold of your bundle!"

Each girl had brought with her either a bundle or a bag containing necessities for the night. Their complete outfits would be along in the morning. Paula looked at the bundle and sighed. "Howevah," she rallied herself, "I suppose I must! Geals, which is precisely the best way to gwapple with this bundle?"

"On your shoulder, duffer!" chuckled Polly. "With a heave—"

"Yow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the mirthful girls, as Paula staggered, with her hat bashed over her eyes, now that the bundle was on her right shoulder.

"Got it?" grinned Polly. "That's right!"

"Bai Jove! The bundle's wight, but my hat's all wong! Heah, geals—my gwacious!" poor Paula panted, turning about in a helpless way. "Look out, or I shall dwop the wetch'd thing! Lo-oo-ook out, I say!"

The bundle slipped behind her, struck the ground, and bounded against Myra.

"Ha, ha, ha!" exploded Polly and others; then they looked very, very solemn, because Myra's dignity seemed to be hurt.

"You clumsy idiot!" Myra snapped at Paula.

"Yes, wather! I mean—pway accept my apologies," said the polite aristocrat. "You will wealise, howevah—"

"Oh!"

"Under the distwessing circumstances, Mywa, it was extwemely twying for me to—"

"That will do! Hold your tongue, Paula!"

Polly said in a loud murmur:

"How sweet some people are! What must the driver think!"

"I know what I think," said Tess, grimacing. "We are in for a nice time at Myra's hands! Hard luck, our getting hew for a prefect!"

The unpopular senior now mustered the girls in fair order on the road, with their bundles, much like a band of soldiers with their "kits." Then, finding that the Fifth Form had already marched on, she gave the signal to advance.

Polly, the irrepressible, "struck up"—an imitation band.

"Ta-ra, ta-ra!" she hummed. "Boom, boom, boom! What a pity the cinema operator isn't here to film us!"

"Yes, wather!" said Paula. "Howevah, I would pwefer to look more pwesentable. Polly deah, is my hat quite stwaight now?"

And so, still in great good spirits, despite the presence of their overbearing senior, they swung along to the still stately entrance gates of the ancient house.

Just inside the long-neglected grounds there was a handsome lodge, and it gave the girls quite a shock to discover that it was tenanted.

The Priory itself being unoccupied, they had quite imagined that the lodge would also be standing empty. But there were clean curtains at the windows, and smoke was coiling from a tall chimney.

Suddenly, indeed, one of the tenants of this snug abode actually stood revealed to the new arrivals.

A very tall, beautiful woman of about forty years came into the open to watch the girls pass in. She could be no paid caretaker, for her stylish dress was such as to make girls like Paula Creel and Audrey Blain gaze in admiration.

The fascinating lady gave all the scholars a most sweet smile, and they murmured a rather shy: "Good-evening!" There was one look that came from her, however, which none of the juniors noticed.

Not one of them saw the secret glance which the woman gave to Myra Marshall—a glance which left that girl very agitated as she walked in advance of Betty and Co.

Half an hour later Madge Minden came into one of the dim, old rooms of the great mansion where most of the Fourth Form had congregated.

"I've found out who the lady is," Madge remarked, in her quiet way. "She and her husband, Mr. Michael Carnay, are renting that lodge, furnished. I met them both, strolling near the house, and they seem to want to be friendly."

"Good egg!" was Polly's breezy comment. "Meanwhile, what do you think of our new classroom, Madge?"

"Without the desks, that I see they have brought along already," said Madge, "it would make a fine music-room. Panelled walls, you know."

"Yes, wather, geals! And, bai Jove!" chimed in Paula, floating into the room at this moment. "I've just fixed on the vewy woom upstairs that's to be my study. A weal wipper! Come and see, Madge deah."

"Hair a sec!" cried the exuberant Polly. "Vote we get some of these desks into place, then see how we look."

"Bai Jove!"

"Mind out of the way, Paula!" was the mad-cap's shout, as she playfully gave one desk a mighty push. "Oh, look out!"

"Yow!" yelled Paula, as she very nearly got caught between the desk and the wall. "Gweat goodness, Polly, how fwivolous you are!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I was in gweat pewil of being weduced to a sandwich, I hope you wealise," Paula complained mildly. "Howevah, quite wight of you to want to get to wights, bai Jove!"

There was something in this so tickling to the other girls, they were all going off into peals of laughter again when in whirled Betty.

"I say," panted Paula, the captain of the Form, "fall in, some of you, for the official opening!"

"What?" cried Polly. "Where?"

For answer, Betty led them all to a certain empty room, where she had a surprise for her chums.

On a large square of black boarding she herself had painted in huge letters:

**"MORCOVE SCHOOL, FOURTH FORM,
TEMPORARY QUARTERS."**

"Hurrah! Hip, pip—" burst out Polly. "Where do we stick it up? Only say, Betty."

"The gates!" suggested half the girls, in a gleeful chorus.

"Yes, wather!"

And so, before five minutes had slipped by, the active youngsters were down by the main entrance to the ground, and Betty and Polly were soon making the board fast to a big tree, plain for all to see.

"Three cheers for the school in the woods!" called Betty, facing round upon the crowd from her lofty position. "Hip, pip, pip—"

"Hurrah!"

Whilst the great cheer was still ringing amongst the slumbering woods, half a dozen Fifth Form girls came racing up.

"Oh, cheek!" cried one of them, as she read the words on the board. "To talk of the Fourth Form temporary quarters! How about the Fifth Form? Betty—"

"Take it down!" clamoured the Fifth Form girls indignantly.

"You can have your own board, if you like," said Betty. "That's our own private one—"

"Yes, wather!"

"And there it stays!" declared Polly, taking the words out of Betty's mouth.

"Are we going to let the Fourth Form put us in the background?" cried the Fifth-Formers.

"No-o-o-o!" was the shout.

"Then, come on!"

And next moment there would have been yet another of those desperate scrimmages, Fourth Form versus Fifth, that Morcove School had so often witnessed! The two Forms seemed to have a fatal knack of upsetting each other over little points of dignity.

The chums had rallied round Betty at the foot of the tree. The Fifth were ready to begin

the onslaught, but now three sounded the tr-r-ring of a cycle-bell, and the girls all saw Miss Redgrave alighting from her machine at the gates.

"Miss Redgrave!" yelled the Fifth.

"Miss Redgrave!" chorused the Fourth.

That young lady looked at the board. Then she laughed.

"Isn't it cheek?" protested the Fifth. "These kids—"

"Kids!" shrilled Polly. "Oh!"

"A rather practical notion, I think," smiled Miss Redgrave, loyal as ever to her Form.

"Well done, the Fourth!"

"Oh, all right!" was all the Fifth could reply to this. And they added: "Wait till you see our board!"

It was perfectly evident that the quartering of the two Forms at the Priory was going to be the cause of more rivalries than ever, and perhaps that was why Polly Linton suddenly laughed with great glee. A rare one for a set-to with the Fifth, was Polly!

"How quickly the darkness falls down here in this wooded hollow," remarked Miss Redgrave, casting a glance around. "I think you had better come in, girls. There must be heaps to do before you get settled for the night."

Eagerly enough the girls turned back with their popular assistant-mistress, for they were yearning to improve their knowledge of the great old house. They were moving on up the broad drive in a light-hearted way when someone suddenly came forth from the old lodge.

It was the husband of the strikingly beautiful lady whom the girls had seen when they first turned up. He, too, was tall and handsome, but a good deal older than she. As he doffed the grey tweed cap, that went so well with his nice tweeds, the girls saw that his hair was quite grey.

"Good-evening, miss; good-evening, young ladies!" he greeted the youthful mistress and her scholars. "So the solitude my wife and I have experienced here is to be broken for a time? Well, we hope you will be comfortable. And what part of the house have you decided to occupy?"

"The east wing," Miss Redgrave informed him.

"Ah, excellent!" he approved. "Of course, my wife and I only rent this pill-box of a lodge. But once or twice we have been over the house. The east wing is decidedly the best part. We thought the west wing extremely gloomy. Damp, too, no doubt."

"Is that so?" said Miss Redgrave.

The elderly gentleman made a pass in the air, most gracefully.

"The trees, you know—very damp! But if you keep strictly to the east wing—so much more open on that side!—then you will be all right, no doubt. Good-evening!"

And nothing could have been nicer than the courtly bow and the smile that he bestowed as he turned back to the lodge.

"Jolly decent of him!" commented Polly.

"Yes, wather! A weal wipper—what!" chimed in Paula, and most of the girls murmured to the same effect.

It was not surprising. Appearances can be very deceptive, especially when they are being put on by people skilled in duplicity.

The time had yet to come when Betty Barton and all other members of the school in the woods were to know that deep cunning and villainy underlay the smooth, friendly bearing of Mr. Michael Carnay and his fascinating wife!

Ordered Back.

"WELL," said Polly Linton, about ten o'clock that night, "I think these Fourth Form bedrooms are a great deal better than the Fifth's!"

"Yes, wather!" agreed Paula heartily. "All the wooms are a twiffe depwessing, pewhaps. How-ewah, it's a tweat to be bwoken up into separate wooms, bai Jove, instead of having a single dowmitow!"

"It's a change, anyhow," said Betty, glancing round this old guest-chamber, which was one of half a dozen that the Fourth Form had taken over.

The girls were going to sleep four or five in a room. Along with Betty, in this particular room, were Polly, Paula, Madge, and Tess.

"The dwawback of a dowmitow," pursued Paula pensively, "is that geals are inclined to wag about!"

"There will be some ragging here, I know," grinned Polly. "The Fifth mean to make life not for us, I fancy. And we shall give them as good as we get—eh, Betty?"

"Well, then go down three steps, and up a corkscrew staircase."

"A—a corkscrew staircase! Heah, bai Jove!" "You'll find your bundle," finished Polly. "And let us know if you see any ghosts. Ha, ha, ha!"

Paula sat down sadly on one of the beds. "How fwivolous you are, Polly! You wealisse quite weal that I stwongly wesent having to gwope about in a stwange old house, How-ewah—"

"The sooner you get used to the Priory, the better," said Polly. "That's the idea! So trot along!"

Instead of trotting, Paula went very slowly indeed. She got as far as the staircase landing, then came back.

"Did you say wound to the wight, Polly?"

"Yes, dear."

"Thanks! Er—you would not care to accompany me on this distwessing pilgwimmiage, Polly?"

"No, dear. Sorry—"

"Quite all wight!" said Paula, with such affability that the teaser's heart was softened



POLLY'S LITTLE JOKE! "Look out, Paula!" cried Polly, giving the desk a mighty push and narrowly missing the swell girl. "Yow!" yelled Paula, in sudden alarm.

"We generally do," chuckled the captain of the Fourth. "What are you looking for, Paula?"

"I was undah the impwession," drawled the aristocrat of the Form, "I bwrought my bundle up to bed. Howewah, it does not appeah to be heah, bai Jove!"

A sudden titter from Polly made the swell girl eye her reproachfully.

"You are vewy fwivolous, Polly. I believe—I have a stwong impwession that you have played a twick with my bundle!"

"Ha, ha—"

"Polly deah, pway be sewious! I must wequest you to explain pweicisely what you have done with my bundle! I am in pwessing need of my bwush and comb, not to say my nightwobes."

"Well, I'll tell you," chuckled Polly, whilst the others could not help smiling. "If you go along the corridor, Paula, and past the staircase landing, and then go to the end of the next corridor—"

"Bai Jove!"

"And round to the right."

"Wound to the wight, bai Jove! Weal?"

Polly almost offered to go with her victim then, but she decided to wait a bit.

Paula would be back again before getting the bundle!

And so it proved.

"Geals," said Paula, reappearing half a minute later, "I gweatly wegwet being a twouble to you. Howewah, when I went wound to the wight, I—Weally, I wather felt distwessed! Very oppwessed, bai Jove!"

"Oh, cowardy, cowardy!" teased Polly.

"I am not aweeah that I was afwaid," said Paula. "Merely depwessed. Without wishing to use a stwong expwession, this old house is extwemely bewildewing after dark. Extwemely disconcerting, bai Jove!"

Even Madge gave one of her rare laughs this time.

"Oh, come on; let's all go and get the bundle," said Betty. "You were a tease, Polly! No joke to make Paula grope about this place on the first night!"

"Not at all," protested Polly. "The house is

all right!" And she began to chant softly, as they all five moved out of the room:

"Ours is a nice house, ours is;

It's got no rats or mouses!"

"Sh! Stop your nonsense!" whispered Betty, but she was laughing under her breath. "We shall have Myra Marshall coming down on us like a ton of bricks!"

"Yes, wather! And then wheah will I be, without my bwush and comb? Not to say my nightwobes, bai Jove!"

After that plaintive remark had come from poor Paula, there was silence. Noiselessly the girls stole along the corridor, hearing the bedtime chatter of the girls in other rooms.

Then Polly was seized with the impulse to rap at one door, and call in mock stern tones:

"Less noise in there, please!"

Open flashed the door instantly, and out came Trixie Hope, Bluebell Courtney, and two or three more girls. The motive for the expedition was explained, and they promptly decided to help Paula find that bundle.

So it was a pretty good crowd altogether that went groping along the panelled corridors and "wound to the wight," and then up that cork-screw staircase for ten steps or so.

Out of this winding staircase they emerged upon a very noble corridor, with room doors only on one side of it. The other side was the outer wall of the house, pierced with many windows.

Moonlight was flooding in through these windows, shedding eerie shadow shapes everywhere.

"The ghost's walk," whispered Polly.

"Oh, be quiet!"

"Yes, wather!"

"Well, there's your bundle, anyhow, Paula," the madcap chuckled, pointing. "Run and get it, and then we'll all turn back."

Paula went forward alone gingerly, whilst most of her chums stepped close to the windows, to peer out and down into the moonlit grounds.

Next moment Betty exclaimed sharply:

"Hallo! I say, did you see—"

"What—where?"

"But I must have been mistaken," Betty admitted, after throwing her chums into such sudden alarm. "I thought I saw a figure moving about, down there on the edge of the shrubbery. But it couldn't have been."

"No, not at this time of night," said Madge.

"Got the bundle, Paula?"

"Yes, wather! And I shall be extremely relieved to get back to our proper quarters, bai Jove!" owned the aristocrat. "Weady, geals?"

For all her eagerness, she was soon lagging behind, the bundle having come to bits.

The others, in fact, had got well ahead of Paula on the return journey, when they found that she was missing, and promptly guessed the reason.

Suppressing their titters, they all turned back, and at that instant Myra Marshall suddenly swooped upon them.

"You—out of your rooms at this time of night!" she blazed at them fiercely. "How dare you! And in this part of the house!"

"We—"

"How dare you come to this part of the house!" she cut them short. "I told you to keep away from the west wing. Miss Redgrave has agreed to my suggestion—the west wing must be out of bounds."

"You said something about that—yes," answered Betty. "But the fact is, we didn't know that this was the west wing!"

Which was perfectly true. None of the girls had got their bearings yet.

"Well, you are not to do any exploring anywhere. Do you understand?" Myra said fiercely. "I won't have it! Just keep to your own quarters."

"Yes, wather!" came the very unfortunate rejoinder from Paula at this instant; and there she was, floundering towards Myra and the rest, with the burst bundle clasped in her arms!

"Geals— Oh! Mywa! I didn't realise—"

"Yes, it's Myra!" snapped back that prefect grimly. "And so I have caught you, too!"

"I gweatly wegwet—"

"That bundle—what does it mean?"

"Weal, you see, Mywa, I have been undah the painful necessity of wetwiewing my comb and bwush—not to say my nightwobes, bai Jove!—fwom the w'ong quarters."

"How did they get there?"

"I can assure you, Mywa, I did not put them theah. They—they went astway, don't you know," Paula said affably. "Yes, wather! Most distressing thing; they went to the w'ong place."

"If I catch any one of you larking about in any part of the house that is out of bounds," Myra said, clenching her hands as she spoke, "I'll make you sorry for it! I will!"

"Mywa—"

"Oh, I've had enough of you, duffer!" snapped the prefect, looking as if she would like to clout Paula. "Get to bed, all of you!"

She watched them until they had passed out of sight—a tall, imperious figure, with a vindictive look upon her face.

Then, breathing freely at last, she moved along the passage that led to the west wing.

In stealthy fashion she came to the great corridor, with all its moonlit windows, and here she paused, taking her stand at one window, to gaze out.

There was a nervous eagerness in the way she scanned the moonlit grounds below.

It was as if she was afraid of seeing something or somebody that the girls might also have seen—and should not have!

And was she pondering again, perhaps, all the desperate, secret motives which were hers, for resenting the other girls' presence at the Priory? Wondering how she was going to keep a check upon their unwelcome activities? Realising only too well what thrilling discoveries the girls might make at any moment?

Perhaps!

Perhaps, too, there was to be no sleep at all for Myra Marshall, on this first night at the Priory; but, instead, hour after hour of staring wakefulness, whilst this nightmare thought would be running in her mind:

"Supposing that box is found amongst the ruins of the fire! They may open it, and then—what am I to do?"

[END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.]

On no account must you miss next week's long complete Morcové story:

"THE SECRET OF THE OLD PRIORY!"

(In it you will gain an inkling as to why Myra Marshall is so agitated over the Morcové girls taking up their quarters at the Priory. The reason is tremendously interesting, so order your copy of next week's SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN at once.)