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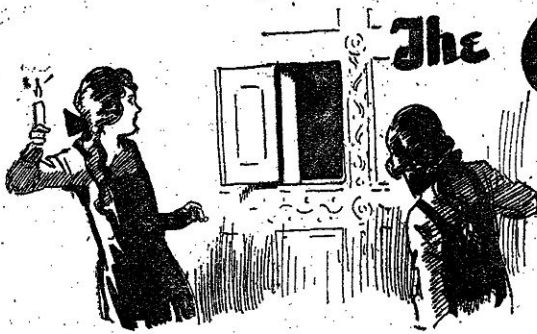
The Schoolgirls' Own



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THE SECRET WORKSHOP!
(An incident from the grand long complete story of the girls of Morcove School in this issue.)

You will enjoy this Splendid "Morcove" Story—As Usual, it is Packed with Interest from Start to Finish.



The COINERS' CAPTIVES

A magnificent new long complete story of the girls of Morcove School and of their unravelling of a deep mystery at the Old Priory.

By MARJORIE STANTON.

Where is Betty Barton?

"MAY we see you for a moment, Miss Redgrave?"

"If it is anything important—yes, girls, by all means!" was the answer that that young lady gave.

She, an assistant-mistress to the Fourth Form of Morcove School, was looking as if she had enough trouble to go on with. So it was not surprising if her response to this party of excited girls, who had suddenly burst in upon her, was a warning to them not to bother her about nothing.

"Well, Polly—all of you?" she added in the next breath, with a forced smile, as if she felt she had been a little too brusque. "You must forgive me, if I seem—"

"Oh, we quite understand!" exclaimed Polly Linton, all breathless after a sharp race to this private room of Miss Redgrave's. "You feel worried to death about Betty Barton's strange disappearance this morning. But it is about just that terrible business that we want to have a word with you!"

"Oh, then—"

"Yes, wather, Miss Wedgwave!" panted one of the other breathless girls. "You may have heard already, perhaps; but there has been a most thrilling discovery!"

"What? No, I have not heard!" cried the youthful mistress, starting up from her chair in great excitement. "Tell me, then! Has the poor girl been—"

"Her bicycle!" burst out Polly; "it has been found—found hidden amongst some bushes in the grounds of this house!"

"Precisely, Miss Wedgwave," came from Paula Creel, in her usual drawl; "and we guals take it as a pwoof, don't you know, that poor, deah Betty did not come to grief outside the school bounds at all, bai Jove!"

"You see, Miss Redgrave—" began one of the other girls; but now Miss Redgrave, thrown into great agitation by the news she had heard, held up a hand, entreating silence.

"One moment, Madge; one moment, please, all of you," she pleaded. "The bicycle, you say, has been found like that? Then it certainly does appear as if Betty returned on it safely to our present quarters in this old house, this morning. Let me think for a second!"

And so the excited schoolgirls held themselves in check, whilst Miss Redgrave took a turn about the

room, her set face proclaiming the stress her mind was suffering.

"Yes!" she exclaimed at last, with deep conviction. "All day, the evidence has seemed to point to Betty's having got back safely to this place, The Priory. We know that first thing this morning I sent her off, on her cycle, on a simple errand to the old, burnt-out school. We know that she completed her errand there; the man in charge of the place has told us that the girl left for her return journey without delay—"

"And then she was seen, a little later, riding in this direction, by a village woman," Polly Linton could not help interjecting. "So nothing happened to her—"

"No; nothing happened to the girl until she was actually home again—at any rate, inside the grounds of the house. And how much more mysterious than ever that makes her disappearance!" was Miss Redgrave's helpless cry.

"Yes, wather, bai Jove! Howevah—"

"Miss Redgrave, it seems more mysterious than ever to you; but no tto us—no!" said Polly, causing the mistress to start back and regard the whole party of girls in an astounded manner.

"Why, whatever do you mean?" she exclaimed. "To me, it certainly does seem incredible that Betty could have come to harm inside the boundary walls of this temporary schoolhouse."

"That is because you do not know all that we know, Miss Redgrave," murmured Madge Minden, one of the few calm girls who were here. "You are not aware that, before ever Betty Barton vanished so mysteriously, strange things were already taking place in this old Priory. We wish to make one point clear at once; we would have come to you much sooner, only—"

"Only what?"

"Miss Redgrave! The fact is, we have been in an awful quandary," Polly Linton blurted out; and, amongst the murmurs from other girls to the same effect, there came Paula's:

"Yes, wather, bai Jove! Howevah—"

"It is the discovery of Betty's bike in the grounds that has induced us to come to you and tell you everything," went on Polly. "That points to her having come to harm inside the school bounds; and to us it suggests far more!"

"Yes, wather!"

"It leads us to believe," Madge Minden exclaimed, "that Betty's disappearance is really connected with the other mysterious happenings."

"But—but— Oh, my dear girls, what mysterious happenings have there been?" was Miss Redgrave's eager cry. "Tell me—describe them! And then, perhaps, I can do something!"

"Well, for one thing," Polly said quickly, "as everybody knows, a lot of bad money has been going about lately. Nothing much in that, perhaps you think; but, Miss Redgrave, we girls—"

Polly made a pause.

"We feel the time has come," she said at last, "to tell you all about—Myra Marshall!"

Myra Marshall's Dilemma.

AT that very moment, in her own little study at The Priory, Myra Marshall was moving about the room restlessly like one in terrible suspense.

Out of doors the autumn evening had closed in, and even the twilight was now all gone from this "den," which she, a senior and a prefect, had the exclusive use of.

Yet she did not see about getting a light to banish the deep gloom.

To and fro, then a pause—to stare out of the window into the night-bound grounds, then to and fro again! Sometimes, too, she paused by her closed door and listened, as if dreading to hear someone coming along to end her solitude.

What was her trouble, then? What the reason for her sighing—so heavily to herself, over and over again? Above all, why were her eyes so full of fear—the guilty fear of a girl living in momentary expectation of being found out!

Every inmate of The Priory to-day had been anxious and miserable. But no other girl, it is safe to say, had had the secret anxieties and miseries that this senior scholar had been suffering, and still was suffering so acutely.

Suddenly she stood quite rigid in the centre of the dark study, looking wildly towards the door.

Someone was coming along the passage! Someone for her, surely!

Yes, it had come at last—a tap at the door, to be followed by a voice calling gently:

"Myra! Are you in there, Myra?"

"What do you want?" she jerked out hoarsely, still holding away from the door.

"Miss Redgrave wishes to speak with you!"

The very summons she had been dreading!

She swept a shaking hand across her forehead. Her heart was thumping wildly. Going to a mirror, she peered at her reflection to see how she looked. Ghastly pale!

"All right, I—I'll be along in a moment!"

So she answered the girl in the passage, who went away, perhaps, to convey that message to the youthful mistress.

Myra spent a few seconds rubbing her cheeks hard, to bring a little colour into them. Then, steadying her breathing as well as possible, she passed from the room, and at last her reluctant steps brought her to Miss Redgrave's room.

In the lamplight, the girl beheld a crowded room. There was only the one mistress; but here were Polly Linton, Paula Creel, Madge Minden, Trixie Hope, Tess Trelawney, and one or two other members of the Fourth Form.

"Close the door, one of you," said Miss Redgrave. "Myra, I will go straight to the point. What do you know about a box of spurious coins?"

"Spurious coins?" echoed Myra, trying to look surprised. But, in the same instant that she spoke, she realised that bluster would never save her. For Miss Redgrave exclaimed:

"Come, come! Be frank with me, Myra!"

"I will be frank with you," the wretched

girl said then, whilst she was actually making up her mind to tell only half the truth.

"Well?"

"You have been told that I brought away a box of spurious coins, after the fire at Moreove School?"

"Yes!"

"It is true," said Myra, allowing herself to look ashamed. "I did bring them away from my old study at that school."

"How did you come into possession of them, Myra?"

"Why, I—I found them," was the confused answer. "A few days before the fire occurred, I made an—extraordinary discovery. I found the box—in a field."

"And you kept it?"

"Yes. It was silly of me, but—but—"

"Did you put any of the coins into circulation?"

Myra exclaimed vehemently:

"No—no! If any of these girls suggest that I made use of the coins, they are making me out to be worse than I am!"

"Calm yourself!" the mistress said coldly. "The girls have not accused you of putting the coins into circulation. I may remark, Myra, the girls have shrunk from saying one word about you, until—well, they had no choice but to speak out."

"I know they have been spying upon me!"

Myra burst out, with sudden anger, but the mistress checked her with a raised hand.

"That will do, Myra. We don't want any violent talk. We have to thrash this matter out quietly and thoroughly." She added, looking the guilty girl steadily in the eyes:

"So you only came by the coins by accident? You did nothing with them, prior to the fire? Why, then, did you think it worth while to make a midnight visit to the burnt school to recover the box and bring it away?"

"Because—" Myra gestured wildly. "I was in sudden fear of the coins being found in my old study, and of people thinking that I kept them for—for some wrongful purpose. I had only kept them for—"

"Saying nothing about them to any of the other girls!" was Miss Redgrave's pointed rejoinder.

"No; I did not tell anybody, I—I just kept them, wondering what I should do with them."

"Very well!" said Miss Redgrave, with judicial calmness. "That is how you account for being in possession of the coins. I shall now ask you: when everybody in the neighbourhood began to talk of the number of bad coins that were going about, you did not feel inclined to speak about your find?"

"No. Why should I?"

"It seems to me that you might have thought the find would help the police to track down any band of coiners that may be carrying on their work in the neighbourhood."

Myra said, with a sullen shrug:

"Well, such a thing never occurred to me!"

"I see!"

There was a pause—very like the heavy pause that comes in a court of law, the breathless pause which precedes a resumption of some vital cross-examination.

Miss Redgrave was taking time to frame her next question.

"Myra," she said at last, impressively, "have you ever had anything to do—in any way whatever—with coiners?"

The girl fell back a step, gasping aloud.

"What do you mean?"

"Answer me, Myra! This evening, in view of Betty Barton's strange disappearance, these girls have quite properly felt impelled to make certain statements to me. They have told me about your box of bad coins—"

"Yes; but—"

"They have also asked me to put this question to you bluntly, and I do so. Have you ever had anything to do with people concerned in the manufacture of spurious coins?"

"No! No! That is my answer, although I don't think the question should ever have been put!" panted Myra, getting more wrought up than ever. "It is a shame for me, a senior and a prefect, to—to be accused of such a thing!"

"You are not accused, Myra. You are suspected, however, and for this reason," Miss Redgrave said gravely: "Being in possession of those coins is an incriminating bit of evidence. And there are other matters known to these girls!"

"What do you mean—other matters?" demanded Myra, twisting and turning the handkerchief which she had taken from her dress pocket. For she had come very near to a burst of hysterical weeping.

"I have been informed that you took that box of coins to a certain well in the grounds of this house, and dropped it down there."

"To get rid of it—yes! I thought that was the best thing to do with the wretched thing! I tell you. I was sorry I had kept the coins!" blustered the girl.

"Yes; and that sounds very plausible," nodded the mistress. "But it appears that two people—a man and a woman—were seen to visit that same well, under cover of night."

"I—I know nothing about—"

"One moment, let me finish. The persons in question were Mr. and Mrs. Michael Carnay, the couple who rent that furnished lodge."

Miss Redgrave gathered her breath again.

"Myra, have you had anything to do with those people?"

"No! I declare I have not!"

"Then how do you account for their visiting the same spot at which you had got rid of the box of coins?"

"I can't account for it at all," said Myra desperately. "Unless—unless they chanced to see me drop the box down the well, and went there to fish it up!"

A stir went through the groups of girls who had been standing by, keen listeners to all the questions and answers. It was like headstrong Polly Linton to give sudden expression to her pent-up feelings.

"Just what we guessed Myra would say! We felt sure she would deny—"

"Yes, wather! Howevah—"

"Gently, girls. I shall soon be finished with this inquiry now," Miss Redgrave interposed. "You do deny, Myra, ever having had anything to do with Mr. and Mrs. Carnay?"

"Yes!"

"And you know nothing about the cause of Betty Barton's disappearance?"

"Nothing!"

Another pause.

For a long moment Miss Redgrave kept her searching gaze upon Myra Marshall's tense face. And the girl, knowing that she was being scrutinised like this, to see if her looks did not belie her words, made a supreme effort to appear innocent and indignant.

"Very well," the mistress concluded at last. "Your explanations and your denials must be accepted, Myra. You may have to repeat them to

the police, for I and my colleagues will have to communicate with the police. But that will not be until the morning, probably; for it seems very desirable to await Miss Somerfield's arrival."

"These girls can say what they like, and so can you!" Myra cried out hysterically. "I don't care! Except that I stuck to a box of coins that I found in a field, I—I—"

"Miss Somerfield was up in London, on business connected with the fire, when this upset occurred," the youthful mistress pursued, ignoring Myra's vehement outburst. "But she is returning by a late train this evening, and will be here by six o'clock to-morrow morning. Mean-time—"

She turned to the girls.

"There is one thing to be done at once," she said. "Take me down to that well in the grounds, and let me see it. As for you, Myra—you may go."

"I—I am still under suspicion, am I?"

"You have given a plausible explanation of all your conduct. I say no more."

"Which means, I am to be looked upon as guilty!" Myra cried out. "You—these hateful



AT BAY! "I will go straight to the point, Myra," said Miss Redgrave. "What do you know about a box of spurious coins?" Myra tried to look surprised. "Spurious coins!" she echoed.

girls—oh, it's a shame!" And she burst into tears at last.

Miss Redgrave looked distressed. Her eye singled out two of the most sympathetic girls in the group.

"Paula, Madge; go with Myra now—"

"No, I don't want them to hang round me!" wailed Myra, weeping wildly. But the mistress said firmly:

"Myra, you must let me do as I think fit. The two girls will go with you, because it is not right for one who is so upset to be alone."

"Can you wonder I am upset!" sobbed Myra hysterically. "When you accuse me of being in with a lot of coiners!"

"We accuse you of nothing of the kind, Myra. Now, go quietly. Paula, dear—Madge; do as I say, please."

"Yes, wather!" assented Paula cheerfully. "Myra! Weally, don't you know, there is no need to be so distwessed."

"How would you like to be accused?"

"You are not accused," broke in Madge gently. "And even if a girl is accused, if she is innocent, as you say you are, she can afford to bear it quietly."

Myra had no answer to that sound remark. Giving a last wipe to her eyes, and swallowing back a last hysterical sob, she went blindly from the room, and Paula and Madge followed.

What Madge and Paula Discovered.

OUTSIDE the door of her own study, Myra suddenly turned upon the girls who were attending her under orders from the mistress.

"Don't come in with me!" she blazed out. "I won't have you round me—I won't!"

"Myra—"

"Yes, Myra—"

"It is insufferable!" the older girl panted. "For me, a prefect, to be treated like this! Go away!"

And next moment she had stepped swiftly into the room and closed the door in the others' faces—slam!

"Bai Jove!" breathed Paula, with a half-comical grimace. "What are we to do now, Madge deah! Weally—"

"We will wait awhile, and see if she doesn't calma down," was Madge's shrewd suggestion. "Not a nice-job, this, Paula!"

"No, wather the werverse, bai Jove! Howvah, one quite wealises, Madge deah," Paula said in a lowered voice, "Miss Wedgwave is sewwy in a way—just as we all are, I'm sure."

"In a way, yes," agreed Madge. "If that explanation Myra gave is a true one, then she has done nothing so very terrible. But—"

"Pwecisely! Howvah—"

"Quite right, Paula; we had better not start discussing it over again."

So, for a minute or more, they maintained a discreet silence, listening all the time, as they felt it right to do, for any sounds from within the study, telling of Myra's state of mind.

Then suddenly a thing happened which was quite unexpected by both girls.

The door flashed open, and Myra called curtly: "Come in!"

"Thank you, Myra!" was Paula's characteristic response, as she and Madge promptly entered the room. "I twust you feel better now—what?"

"I feel disgustid with the lot of you!" Myra exclaimed bitterly, but with more self-control than she had shown five minutes ago. "What girl wouldn't! Even if you did know about my having that box of coins, it was a mean thing to do, your rushing off to tell Miss Redgrave!"

"Myra, be fair!" pleaded Madge. "We did not go to Miss Redgrave about that business until there was evidence to show that Betty Barton vanished after her return to this house. Don't you see, Myra? You must—"

"Pwecisely, Myra! Be weasonable, pway do! Wealising as you must haow distwessed we are about poor Betty's disapeawance, haow could you expect us to wefain fwom—"

"Oh, you get on my nerves with your palaver!" snapped Myra. "Look here, I just want to tell you! If Betty has been—if she has come to harm at the hands of some people or other—I've had nothing to do with it! And now I have told you that, you can go!"

"Thank you, Myra! It is only a repetition of what you remarked in Miss Wedgwave's pwe-sence. Howvah—"

"We will go, Myra," broke in Madge gently, "if you will-assure us that—well, you are not going into more hysterics, Miss Redgrave only wanted us to stay with you whilst you were so upset."

"Do I look upset now?" challenged Myra fiercely.

She did not. All her wild agitation had been succeeded by a sort of passionate calmness. Now, indeed, she looked just what she would have everybody believe her to be—a much-injured innocent.

So convinced that they were doing quite the right thing, Madge and Paula withdrew.

"Wun with the upstairs, Madge deah!" pleaded Paula, starting to fiddle with her hair. "Some-how, bai Jove, I feel I want to put myself to wights! We have had such an exciting evening, it has left me quite wuffed!"

So, in another minute, Paula and Madge were upstairs in the fine big bedroom to which they had been allotted, along with Betty, Polly, and Tess, when the Fourth Form and the Fifth entered into temporary occupation of the old Priory.

The room had once been one of the best guest-chambers in the great old house. It was beautifully panelled, and lattice casements were another picturesque feature of the place.

Whilst Paula, having lit a candle, busied herself in front of the mirror, Madge wandered to the lattice window, and stood there, peering out.

"I can see some lantern-light amongst some bushes down in the grounds," she remarked quietly. "So Polly and the rest are still there at the old well, with Miss Redgrave."

"Pwecisely!" drawled Paula, giving the carefulest touch to a kiss-curl. "Howvah, I cannot see that they are likely to make any thwilling discovery, Madge deah!"

"Oh, no. We made the only discovery that was to be made when we fished up that box of coins! By the way—"

Madge suddenly turned round.

"How curious! We never told Miss Redgrave what we had done with the box. And she never thought to ask us!"

"Bai Jove! Howvah, it is not so wemarkable, Madge. We were so distwessed—"

"Yes. Still, I think Miss Redgrave ought to have the box now."

"Yes, wather!"

"It is in the chimney, isn't it?" Madge pursued, drifting across to the huge, open fireplace. "That was poor Betty's idea to put the box out of sight up there, for the time being."

"Pwecisely, Madge deah! And pway mind the soot!"

"Oh, it is ages since any fire was lighted in this grate, I fancy!" laughed Madge. "Anyhow, I'm not quite so afraid of a speck of dust or soot as you are, you vain thing!"

She was already stooping low to peer up into the vast recess of the great chimney.

"I don't see the box, Paula! Strange, because it is certain no one can have taken it away. Can you bring the light, dear?"

"Yes, wather!"

Paula beamed with willingness as she came across with the candle.

"No; you give me the candle," smiled Madge. "I may have to reach up and claw hold of a lump of old, hard soot!"

"Ugh! However, pway don't think I am afraid of a bit of dirt, Madge deah!" Paula said, handing the light to Madge.

Next second, however, the drawler had changed her tone.

"Gweat goodness, Madge!" was her amazed cry. "Half a second, bai Jove!"

"Why?"

"Madge deah, hold the candle further into the chimney. When you do that— Yes, bai Jove! Haow extwaordinawy!" Paula palpitated, "I can see the light shining through a cwanny!"

"What?"

"In the panelling, Madge!"

"Oh!"

Madge's interest was fired. She backed out of the huge fireplace, and thrust the candle into her chum's hands.

"I want to see, Paula. You go in with the candle, and I'll watch!"

"Yes, wather!"

Nor did the swell girl of the Form, in her great excitement, care a rap about brushing delicate clothes against any grimy walls.

Into the recess formed by the great fireplace she huddled, holding the light in the desired position.

"Naow, Madge deah—"

"Yes, I see it. Paula, come out of that, quick! Oh, we have made a most thrilling discovery—at least, you have! The cranny, which shows when the light is held in the chimney and the room is in darkness—it means—"

"A secret panel, what? Bai Jove, my idea, p'cisely!"

Madge, trembling with excitement, took the candle again, and held it close to the panelling on one side of the fireplace.

"Yes," she breathed tensely, "a secret panel—one we would never have detected if we had not been using the candle in the chimney. Some of the light must filter in behind this wall, and—"

"Bai Jove, Madge! Do you recollect—"

"This is the wall that has got so hot once or twice at night time—yes!" rushed on Madge. "Which means it is a mere thin panel opening into some shaft or other, like a chimney."

With a distracted "Hold it, Paula!" she handed the candle back to her chum, then started to fiddle with the ornamental bosses that adorned the woodwork.

They formed a carved decoration that was repeated all over the room; but Madge shrewdly expected that the wooden bosses just here served another purpose besides that of decoration.

And she was right.

All at once her fumbling fingers tightened about one boss.

"I felt it move," she whispered. "It turns—it—oh!"

"Bai Jove!"

Madge fairly staggered back, blundering against Paula. Side by side they stood for a moment, motionless, staring in awed amazement at the panel, which had opened outwards with just the faint click of some mechanism.

"Weal, of all the extwaordinawy discoveriewies!" Paula breathed at last. "Theah you are, plain enough—a secret wess in the wall, bai Jove!"

Madge put her hand into the recess and her fingers closed over a small bolt. She pulled at

this, and the lower part of the panel swung open also.

"Wonderful that we've discovered it," exclaimed Madge; "but nothing so very wonderful about its being here. Think of the age of the house, Paula—"

"Yes, wather!"

"And what a need there was, in olden days, for secret passages and rooms! I say." Madge went on breathlessly, "shall we go in?"

"Er—yes, wather!"

"Why not, Paula? It may be that we shall find—"

"P'cisely! I am quite agweeable, Mable deah."

"Then come on!"

So saying, Madge stepped to the lower panel, drew it wide open, and then stooped and passed through the sinister opening.

"Quite all right—yes, wather!" Paula answered serenely, stepping after her chum. "Gwacious, how stuffy the air is, howevah!"

"It is pure, anyhow, or the candle would not be burning so brightly," Madge answered. "Close the bottom panel and bolt it and draw the top one almost shut, Paula, in case— But not quite shut!"

"No, bai Jove! I should gweatly wogret shutting myself in heah, Madge deah! Howevah—"

Snick! was the sharp, snapping sound which suddenly startled Madge; and next moment she heard a horrified gasp from her chum. She turned about, candle in hand.

"What's the matter, Paula?"

"Bai Jove, Madge deah! I am d'weedfully sowy, and all that, don't you know! Howevah, I wather fancy that I have—"

"You haven't shut the panel upon us—shut it fast!"

But that was just what poor Paula had done! And another ten seconds were to leave both girls convinced that the panel was not to be opened again from this inner-side!

Many Things Explained.

"Bai Jove! Haow diswessing!"

"Never mind!" Madge exclaimed.

"We can easily smash the panel open, when we want to. Shall we go back at once, though? Don't you feel you must explore, Paula?"

"Er—yes, wather!"

"Do you really want to go on, or—"

"Er—er—yes, p'cisely, Madge deah!—Howevah, it is wather cobwebby, wath?"

"Bother cobwebs!" laughed Madge. "I'll go first."

She suited the action to the word, squirming past Paula in what was a very confined space, only just big enough to hold them both.

"Careful!" was Madge's muttered warning to herself, as she moved forward, candle in hand. "One thing I'm afraid of, Paula—that is, a shaft leading down through the house. I expect to come to one, because I'm certain that— Hallo," she broke off excitedly, "here we are!"

She was standing quite still all at once, and Paula came up with her very gingerly, guessing that Madge was on the very brink of some well-like opening in the floor.

And so she was.

Silence fell between the thrilled girls whilst they stood cautiously there, gazing downwards. It was a vertical shaft which led they knew not whither. But, for as far down as the candle enabled them to see, they beheld iron footholds driven into the wall.

Suddenly Madge turned to Paula.



WAS HE SINCERE? "Good-night, ladies," said Mr. Michael Carnay. "Let us hope another day will provide a happy solution to the mystery of the girls' disappearance."

"Do you know what I am thinking?" Madge said excitedly. "Betty herself found out this secret place, and that is why she is missing!"

Paula gave an understanding nod.

"You mean, Madge deah—"

"Put two and two together," exclaimed that girl. "Betty returns safely from that errand on her bicycle; she enters the house at a time when we are all in class."

"Yes, pweicely!"

"And she comes up to the bedroom to run a comb through her hair, after the ride. She suddenly thinks of the box of coins in the chimney, and—"

"And so she makes the discovery! Bai-Jove, Madge, you are wight!"

"No, I am not!" Madge suddenly owned, ruefully. "For that theory doesn't account for Betty's bike being found in the grounds, amongst some bushes!"

"Gwacious, no! She—"

"She would have taken the bike to the proper place, before entering the house. At any rate, she would not have hidden it amongst the bushes."

Madge added in the next breath:

"All the same, Paula, I feel like going down this shaft. Why not? We can easily climb back!"

"Yes, wather! Howevah—quite all wight!" Paula declared, with rather more eagerness. "As you remark, Madge—we can always weturn!"

"Here goes, then!"

So saying, Madge got down upon her knees, and, still keeping a good grasp of the candle, began the descent.

Paula followed. She was not quite so deft at the job as was Madge, and she soon began to splutter and fume because of the dust that came

away from the brick wall. But she never voiced a murmur of regret at their having made the venture. Paula had grit, for all she was so often the laughing-stock of the Form.

How far down they were, and how much farther they had yet to go, neither girl could conjecture, when they both heard a very uncanny sound.

Only for an instant were they startled, however; then they began to feel almost amused. For the sound, although so eerie, was easily accounted for.

It was nothing else but the murmur of talk from girls who were only just on the other side of this brick wall!

Madge and Paula realised at once that they had only to call out, and they would give a very big surprise to those other girls. The adventurous pair refrained; at the same time, it steadied their nerve to know that they were still in touch, as it were, with other members of the school.

Spike by spike they clambered down, conscious all the time of the air they were breathing being quite fresh, and yet very close.

It was as if they were in a great chimney that had only just cooled off after serving to carry away the hot smoke of a furnace.

"Gently, now!" Madge suddenly whispered to her chum. "I am at the foot of the shaft, Paula."

"And that's a wclief, bai Jove!" was the swell girl's breathless response. "Phew! Madge deah, I am just about wedy to drop the west of the way!"

"You wouldn't drop far. Only, you would drop on to me—so please don't!" said Madge.

The thrill of this adventure was making her very high-spirited.

Paula, at a pause just above her chum, peered down.

She saw Madge swinging about to get a footing that did not seem to be there. Did the bottom of the shaft open out from the roof of some underground chamber? If so, Paula suddenly "wecised," it might be a fatal thing to drop to the floor—fatal in the sense that they would not be able to get back into the chimney!

But, to the swell girl's great relief, there now came a reassuring word from her chum.

"It is all right, Paula. There is something just below that we can easily drop to—only a foot or so. A stone bench, it looks like. I'm going!"

And Madge "wcut."

She let go her hold of the last spikes, and dropped lightly, carrying the candle with her. It had grown a long wick during the girl's descent, guttering all the time, and the flaring flame did not go out as Madge dropped. Even if it had expired, however, that would have been no great disaster. Madge had some matches.

"Can you manage?" she called up quickly.

Paula answered by gasping:

"Yes, wather! Look out, Madge!" and came down, flop!

Then, by the light of the candle, they peered around.

They were perched on what Madge had taken to be a stone bench, but it was nothing of the kind. To their utter amazement, they found they had landed on top of a raised, open fireplace, like a blacksmith's "hearth."

Down they sprang on to the brick floor of this vast underground chamber to which their daring had brought them. Then they peered round again.

"Look—bellows to get furnace-heat when the fire is going!" Madge exclaimed excitedly. "And

there is a bit of iron piping to carry the smoke and fumes straight into the chimney-shaft!"

"By Jove—"

"Oh, and look here!" Madge gasped again, turning in another direction. "Electric batteries, moulds and presses! Paula dear, do you understand?"

"Gweat goodness, Madge deah—no, I don't!"

Madge's trembling hand fell upon her chum's shoulder.

"Paula," she whispered, "we have found the coiners' workshop!"

The Coiners' Lair.

"**WE** must go back now!" Madge said sharply.

Paula nodded in a dazed manner.

"Yes, wather, bai Jove! Of all the wemarkable things, Madge!"

"This beats the band!" agreed the other girl, looking about her again. "Here, in an underground chamber below the very house where all we girls have been quartered—a coiners' lair!"

"I—I don't like it, Madge deah!" Paula confessed quaveringly. "Those howvid batteivics and things, don't you know, they wather fwighten me!"

"Nothing here to harm us, dear. So long as no one comes along, we are all right! But we must go back to tell everybody about our discovery. Oh, I do wonder," Madge went on, "did Betty find her way into this underground place—"

"By some other entwance?"

"Yes, Paula, supposing that well where we fished up the box of coins—"

"Bai Jove!"

"Supposing there is a way in there!" Madge rushed on, with returning excitement. "Come to think of it, there was an iron plate in the wall of the well! That may have been a door!"

"Madge deah, in that case, shall we go back, after all? At once, I mean," said Paula. "I own to being wather afwaid. Howevah, if we can explore, and pefwahps find poor Betty, that's what I want to do, Madge!"

"Then we will! Come on! The candle is good for another hour yet!" Madge declared.

She murmured, as she moved on again:

"It is an enormous chamber, this! See, though, there is a sort of tunnel leading out of it. There are two tunnels—and we'll try each one!"

"Yes, wather!"

They crossed cautiously towards the one Madge had first espied. It was a narrow passage-way burrowed through the earth; how far below the surface they had no idea. The dim candle-light only seemed to make the entrance look blacker and more uninviting than ever; but the girls were not to be daunted.

The same thought was getting a firm hold upon the mind of each schoolgirl-explorer. Somewhere down here in the bowels of the earth—down here in these subterranean passages, which had been fashioned centuries ago, maybe—their missing chum was perhaps to be found!

"But only think what she must have been suffering all these hours," Madge exclaimed, in sudden distress, "if she found her way into this place alone and could not get out again!"

"Madge deah, I—I would wather, you wewained from such wemarks!" faltered Paula. "My wegard for poor Betty is so gweat, I—weally, it is too distwessing, don't you know! Pardon?"

"What duffers we are!" Madge said, repeating

the exclamation she had just voiced. "We should be calling out, in case Betty is here!"

"Bai Jove—"

"Both together! Now!" Madge said, standing still to give the shout. "Betty Barton! Hallo, Betty!"

Appalling was the rumbling note their united voices assumed amidst the walls of the mysterious passage.

"Betty Bar—ton! Are you there, Betty? Hallo—hallo, Betty!"

Then—hark! Was that a faint voice calling back?

No, Alas! it was surely only a very distant echo of their loud outcry.

"Again, Paula!"

And again, with all the breath they had, both girls shouted once more.

"Betty Bar—ton! Betty Bar—ton! Hallo—o-o-o!"

Far and wide the appealing shout seemed to rumble and re-echo; then there was silence.

"No answer," murmured Paula sadly.

But Madge suddenly exclaimed:

"Listen! There, don't you hear? Oh—"

"Hooway!" Paula fairly yelled. "Yes, wather! That was Betty, wight enough! Madge deah—Madge darling—"

"Sh! Steady! This way!" Madge jerked out, going tremblingly forward along the passage.

It turned and twisted in a fashion that neither girl troubled to notice. Faster, faster, they hastened



ALSO REPORTED MISSING! "Myra is not in her bedroom or her study," said Miss Redgrave. "She has gone on some midnight expedition," declared Polly Linton.

along, hearing the missing girl's muffled cries for help growing steadily louder.

"All right, Betty! We are coming—Madge and Paula are coming!" Madge sang out, to give comfort to the poor girl, whose suspense they could imagine.

Fully a hundred paces they must have penetrated along that winding labyrinth before they suddenly came to a wider passage, with a door in one wall.

That door, surely it was all that now lay between them and the chum they loved; the door of Betty's prison!

It was certainly locked; but, perhaps, oh, perhaps, the key was on the outer side of it! If not, they could cry a few words of hope to the hapless girl, and then rush back for help.

"Help, help!" came the muffled appeal in Betty's exhausted voice. "Help!"

She could be heard, too, beating the door with her hands, frantically.

"Dreadful!" gasped Paula, shaking all over. "Oh, Madge dear, we must release her at once! We must!"

"We will!" was the fierce response.

But now—hark!

In a startled way, both girls suddenly stood quite still, looking back in the direction from which they had come.

They were not alone!

Behind them in the dark passage, at least two figures were hastening after them. Shuffling steps were audible, and some excited whispering.

"Look out, Paula!" Madge said tensely. "Be on your guard, dear!"

"Yes, wather!"

From inside the locked-up chamber came Betty's desperate cry again:

"Madge—Paula! Help me, quick! Set me free, before they come!"

But "they" were already here!

All in an instant the figures of Michael Carnay and his wife appeared before Madge and Paula.

There was a moment whilst the candle in Madge's hand shone feebly upon the corner and his wife. Then the couple rushed upon the schoolgirls; the candle was knocked out of Madge's grasp and extinguished, and in utter darkness both she and Paula were borne to the ground, struggling in vain to resist the same captivity which had befallen poor Betty!

Mr. Carnay is so Sorry.

LATE that night, when all four members of the teaching staff who had been in charge at

The Priory were engaged in anxious converse, a maid entered with the announcement that a gentleman wished to speak with them.

"Who is it, Emma?" asked Miss Massingham.

"Mr. Carnay, ma'am. The gentleman what lives at the lodge."

Michael Carnay! The very man whom all four ladies had begun to suspect of being concerned, with his wife, in the strange happenings of the last few days. And yet there was no definite evidence against the couple yet.

"We must be very careful what we say to him," Miss Massingham suggested, after the maid had withdrawn to show the caller in. "For the present, we had better not let him think he is suspected."

The others only had time to nod their agreement with this cautious policy, when the maid spoke from the doorway:

"Mr. Carnay, if you please!"

He came forward, with a smile and a bow for the ladies; a tall, handsome man, nicely dressed in

tweeds, looking every inch a gentleman who was enjoying a quiet, country life at his little, rented "place" in this glorious part of Devonshire.

"Good-evening, ladies!" he said cordially, with another bow. "I am late, I know; but my wife and I could not turn in for the night before I had made some inquiry about the missing girl!"

"Won't you sit down?" Miss Massingham invited him, blandly.

"For a moment, then, yes," he assented, and seated himself. "Now tell me, please—for we are so anxious! Is there no clue as to what has become of the girl?"

"She is still missing, and we do not know where she is."

"Ah! Pity! And the police—what do they say?"

"We have only notified them that a girl is missing; we have not yet brought them here to investigate," said Miss Massingham. "In the absence of our principal, we have marked time, as it were."

"The wisest thing, perhaps," he nodded.

"But to-night things have taken a far graver turn," Miss Massingham informed him. "Two other girls have vanished!"

"What?" His amazement was apparently unbounded.

"Two girls named Madge Minden and Paula Creel. They have been missing since before seven o'clock. And what has become of them, we simply do not know!"

Michael Carnay stood up.

"But how extraordinary!" he cried. "Two more girls—missing! Is it possible, do you think, that they have got upon some hot scent which they think may lead them to where the other girl is, and that they have followed up the trail—?"

"Without letting us know! Very foolish of them, if that is the case," said Miss Massingham. "But their disappearance certainly does suggest something of the sort!"

"If there is anything I can do?" he asked, twirling his cap like one ready to be off. "My wife and I—we don't like to be down there at the lodge, taking no part whatever in this baffling mystery!"

"Thank you!" Miss Massingham answered gently, still speaking for herself and her colleagues. "It does not appear, however, that you can give us any help."

"Then at least let me assure you of my own and my wife's deep sympathy," he said, backing towards the door. "And pray do not hesitate to communicate with us at the lodge, during the night, should anything transpire. In view of this sad business, it is quite likely we shall remain up."

Miss Massingham said again: "Thank you!" and she bowed cordially, in every way disguising her mistrust of this man.

"Good-night, then, ladies," he exclaimed from the doorway. "And let us hope that another day will provide a happy solution to the whole mystery!"

He went away with his firm step, humming to himself. Outside the porch of the front door, he lit a cigarette, then set off down the main drive towards the lodge, carrying himself with a jaunty step, as perhaps Miss Massingham and her colleagues noticed, watching him round the edge of a window-blind.

Michael Carnay tossed his cigarette away when he got to his own front door at the lodge. He

passed inside, then turned about to make the door fast by its top and bottom bolts.

"Well, Michael?"

That was his beautiful wife, as she came to the threshold of the lamp-lit sitting-room to hear any news he might have to tell her.

"My dear, it is quite all right," he assured her gaily, resting a caressing hand upon her shoulders as he turned her back into the room. "We need not worry a scrap!"

"They are not hiding their suspicions from you, you are sure?" she questioned, remaining just a little ill at ease.

"Positive!" he declared. "Even if the police were here to-night, I would not be inclined to worry! This is certain, anyhow, those two other girls got into the underground passages without leaving any clue for other people to follow up! And that is everything!"

His wife nodded.

"Yes, Michael. And so we have only to keep them under lock and key, with the first girl, and we shall yet win through!"

"We shall!" he agreed, seating himself and crossing his legs composedly. "I may not be able to do all that I wanted before clearing out. It may be inadvisable to take another spell at the moulds. But we will certainly save the plant, for use somewhere else!"

Again Mrs. Carnay nodded.

"That certainly seems the chief thing to think of now," she muttered. "To get the plant away before we clear out! After all the trouble and expense we went to, getting it together, Michael—"

"Ay, I am not going to be stamped out of this show, leaving those things of mine behind!" he declared, frowning resolutely. "It may be a slow business; a risky job altogether, my dear; but—"

"I'll answer for the girls giving no trouble," she put in softly. "If you can do the rest, Michael."

"Exactly! We will pull together, my dear, as we always have done." He smiled quite affectionately, whilst he stood up to light another cigarette.

"Shall you need to visit the girls again to-night?" he asked, bending towards the lamp to light up at the chimney.

His wife glanced at the clock.

"Yes, I must," she said, chafing her delicate hands together. "They must have something in the way of food, I suppose, if only to help them settle down and get some sleep."

"Ay!"

The woman did not appear to think that it was time to go to the captives just yet. She took one of her husband's cigarettes and seated herself, and for awhile he and she talked in discreet tones.

At the end of half an hour, however, he got up and went out to the kitchen.

Taking a loaf and the butter-dish from the pantry, she cut some thick slices. These, with some other food of a very plain description, she made into a bundle, along with a bottle of water.

She was just knotting together the ends of the cloth in which the prisoners' food was done up, when her husband sauntered in from the sitting-room.

"You are ready, I see!"

"Yes, Michael. And so—"

"Right you are!"

With the word, he stooped and whipped aside a square rug which covered part of the old-fashioned stone-flagged floor. He went upon his

knees with the evident intention of doing something to one of the flags, then paused.

"Hark!" he whispered, rearing his head to listen.

His wife suppressed a sharp gasp of dismay.

"Someone about the grounds, at this late hour!" she said excitedly. "Michael, have those school-teachers deceived you? Are the police—"

"We'll soon see!" he muttered. "But it is probably only a nobody, sent down from the house with some message. Hide that bundle, yes!"

Whilst his wife was doing this, he went forward to the front door and drew back the bolts. A moment, and he was stepping forth into the bright moonlight, humming softly, to give the appearance of being quite at ease.

Someone had been close at hand, moving with a slinking step. Now, as if alarmed by the unbolting of the lodge door and the man's appearance in the open, the person, whoever it was, had either stood quite still, or was stealing away without a sound.

Carnay the coiner did the bold thing, as usual.

He strode swiftly down the short garden path and out through the wicket, calling sharply:

"Hallo! Who is that?"

There was no answer. But now, in the moonlight, he beheld a figure trying to dodge away unseen. Only a girlish figure, and with a sudden rush he was after her and had caught her.

"Myra!" came his amazed exclamation, as he recognised the girl. "Myra! But what are you doing here? Where are you going?"

She answered him hoarsely:

"I have had enough of it! I can't stand things any longer! I am going to run away!"

Under Lock and Key.

ENVELOPED in the pitch-black darkness of that underground prison, to which all three of the coiners' captives were now consigned, Madge Minden reached out a groping hand as she lay upon a thick rug that was spread over one corner of the floor.

The hand came into contact with the recumbent figure of another girl, and Madge whispered:

"Betty darling!"

There was no response.

"She is asleep," the other girl murmured to herself, withdrawing the feeble hand. "Just as well!"

"Yes, wather!"

"Oh! Is that you, Paula—still awake, like me?" Madge exclaimed, sitting up. "You heard what I said then? Poor Betty, she has dropped off to sleep—thank goodness, for her own sake!"

"Bai Jove, you are wight, Madge deah!" came Paula's quavering response. "We realise what it is to have been here for only a few hours. And that poor geal—"

"She was worn out long before we ourselves were made prisoners. Poor Betty!" Madge murmured, with infinite tenderness.

It was such a darkness as the eye cannot possibly get accustomed to. With all the greater caution then—for fear of a clumsy movement that would rouse the sleeping girl—Madge edged closer, and felt to see if anything could be done for Betty's comfort.

She was lying upon her side, her weary head pillowed upon one arm. Madge reached over, and, feeling for a corner of the rug, drew it over Betty's feet, to keep them warm.

"If only we had a light, Madge deah!" came dolefully from Paula. "Then one could put one's hair to wights!"

"Well," responded Madge, with a mirthless laugh, "if that is the worst thing you have to complain about—ruffled hair!"

"No, bai Jove, it isn't, Madge dear. How-
evah, I just made the remark, don't you know!
I—I feel one must twy and cawwy on!"

"That hateful woman said she would be coming
in before midnight, to see how we are getting
on," Madge muttered. "Oh, how I would like
to fly at her, when she shows her face! But——"

The speaker sighed hard.

"I suppose the husband will be with her, and
so how could we hope to fight our way out? If
she comes to us alone, though——"

"Yes, wather, Madge deah, I shall be weady,
you know! Weady to cawwy out any stwuggle,
to get out of this dweadful pwedicament."

Again Madge gave her mirthless laugh.

"Predicament! I like the mild words you use,
Paula darling! It seems to me we are in a
frightful pickle! That hateful pair—they don't
mean'to let us go until it suits their book!"

"What was it poor Betty told us, deah?" pur-
sued Paula. "That the howwid wetches want to
make a lot more spurious coins, and then smuggle
the plant away, before they wrelease us! Ah,
weal!"

Paula's resigned sigh was followed by little
fumbling sounds in the darkness, and suddenly
Madge asked softly:

"What are you doing, Paula. Settling down
to go to sleep?"

"Bai Jove, no! Only trying to put my hair
to wights, Madge deah. I find it extremewly
twying, to have a lot of hair wuffed aound my
ears!"

"You funny girl! But I love you for it, Paula!
I would rather have you for a fellow-prisoner than
a girl who fell to blubbing, as some girls would!"

"No use cwying, Madge! Fancy cwying, when
Betty herself was as cheerwy as anything before
she settled down! If she had not been so
thowghly pwostwate, she would have been
wattling away now, to both of us!"

Madge exclaimed softly: "Hark!" and in an
instant Paula was sitting very still.

"Someone coming—yes!" was Madge's faint
whisper a few seconds later. "Shall we wake
Betty?"

"Yes, wather! At least——"

"Better to let her sleep, unless there is a
chance for us to go for Mrs. Carnay," Madge
pondered aloud. "Paula!"

"Yes, Madge?"

"If Mrs. Carnay is alone——"

"Yes, bai Jove! Oh, wather!"

Enough had been said. Now both wakeful girls
strained their hearing harder than ever, trying to
analyse the faint sounds which came from the
passage-way outside the locked door.

They heard light footsteps; but whether they
were those of two people, or only one person, it
was impossible to tell.

Had Mrs. Carnay come to look in upon them
alone?—that was the vital question.

Oh, if only they could tell, before the key in
the lock was turned back, whether the moment
had come to make a desperate bid for freedom,
or whether they must still resign themselves to this
awful imprisonment!

They heard Mrs. Carnay speaking quite clearly
on the outer side of the door—not calling in to
them, but speaking in an ordinary tone. So,
then, that settled all their hopes of being able to
make a dash. Her husband was with her!

"Yes, you wait here, Michael," they heard her

say, just as her hand turned back some great key
in the lock. "You will be ready, of course, in
case they show fight!"

Then the door swung open, and a brilliant
electric torch flashed upon the girls' faces.

Madge and Paula were on their feet, and they
held together, dazzled and confused by the blind-
ing light. The ray flashed for an instant upon the
sleeping Betty, who at once stirred and mur-
mured in her sleep. Then it flashed back upon the
couple who had needed no rousing.

Remaining over by the half-open door, Mrs.
Carnay set a bundle in front of her, upon the
floor.

"Food and drink, if you want any," she said
curtly.

Even Paula, the polite, forgot, for once, to say
"Thanks!" Like Madge, she stood glaring re-
sentfully, fiercely, at this beautiful, merciless
woman who was the coiner's wife and accomplice.

With the confused air of one whose mind is
all chaotic, Betty now sat up, then staggered to
her feet.

"Paula! Madge!"

"Quite all wight, Betty dear!" Paula said,
giving the newly-awakened sleeper a reassuring
grip of the hand. "We are with you, yes,
wather!"

Mrs. Carnay was going to say something; but
paused. She smiled craftily as she caught Madge
in the act of trying to peer beyond her, through
the narrow opening left by the door.

Taking a quick, backward step, the woman as
good as filled that opening with her tall, slender
figure.

"There is nothing and nobody out there to
interest you girls," she said mockingly; "only
my husband!"

But was he really there, or was the woman only
bluffing?

So Madge, at least, was suddenly wondering.

In a flash it had occurred to her perhaps the
woman had only pretended to be speaking with
her husband, before the door was opened. And, in
that case, there might be a chance.

"Yes," Mrs. Carnay resumed, letting that
mocking smile of hers play about her lips, "you
have two friends to keep you company now, Betty
Barton! Have you told them what the warning
was that I gave you?"

"Oh, go away!" panted Betty. "Don't forget
what I warned you, in return! You will go too
far, and the police will yet have you!"

"The police—ha, ha, ha!" Mrs. Carnay laughed
lightly, derisively. "Let the whole local force
take over the Priory; neither my husband nor I
will trouble! They may visit the well, but they
will never find the secret way into the under-
ground passages! They may search the lodge,
but they will never find the stone flag in the
kitchen, which is our other way in!"

She took a moment for breath.

"And so, here you stay, the three of you, until
it suits us to let you go! Understand, you two
who have been made prisoners to-night give me
the least trouble, and I shall know how to break
your spirit!"

"How?" Madge asked, with apparent fear; but
secretly she was keeping quite steady, wondering
whether it was not a certainty that the woman
had come alone.

"Betty Barton knows," answered Mrs. Carnay.
"You will not be given a light of any sort."

"Betty—Paula—now!" Madge shouted sud-
denly.

And with the word she herself dashed straight towards the coiner's wife.

The whole thing was done with such lightning sharpness, marvellous it was that Mrs. Carnay was not taken off her guard.

But, in the very instant that saw Madge crying "Now!" the quick-witted woman darted backwards. At the same time, she switched off the torch.

Then—clang! The door was pulled shut violently, and the key was turned, leaving all three girls as helpless as ever within the four walls of the underground prison.

To their ears, as they stood grouped together on the inner side of the locked door, came a distant laugh from Mrs. Carnay—a laugh of fensdich mockery.

"Ha, ha, ha! Not that time, my girls!"

Madge drew a panting breath.

"Oh, was it foolish of me?" she exclaimed ruefully. "I only know that it seemed certain that

"I thought it was much later. How the time drags!"

"Yes."

"One comfort, the police will be here in the morning."

"Yes," Polly said again, dully, "and Miss Somerfield. But will all that make any difference? Oh, this suspense, Tess!"

"I wonder if that is the explanation, what the girls were saying this evening?" Tess pondered aloud—"that Madge and Paula must have gone chasing off on some trail which they think will—"

"Sh!"

Polly was suddenly sitting up in bed.

"Someone moving about the house—fancy, at this time of night!" she whispered excitedly. "Why, it is someone coming along our corridor!"

The footfall she had detected was certainly



A TIGHT CORNER! Madge and Paula looked back with startled glances. Behind them, in the dark passage, were two figures—Michael Carnay and his wife!

Mr. Carnay was not there. She was alone, quite alone, and I thought there was a chance!"

"Quite all wight, Madge deah!" came Paula's cheering murmur. "Next time, pewhaps!"

"Yes," muttered Betty fiercely, "another time!"

Waiting for Myra.

IN the bedroom, which she was sharing with only one other girl to-night, Polly Linton suddenly heaved over with a hard sigh in the darkness.

"Oh, I can't sleep to-night!" she moaned to herself miserably. "I simply can't get a wink, for wondering what has become of Betty! And Madge and Paula, too—where are they now?"

Across the spacious bedroom came a murmur from Tess Trelawney.

"I'm the same, dear! Can't get to sleep, no matter how I try! What's the time now, I wonder?"

Polly reached for her wrist-watch. She scanned the illuminated dial.

"Past midnight, Tess."

growing more distinct, and in a flash she and Tess were both out of bed.

"Yes, who is there?" Polly called softly, advancing across the moonlit room towards the door.

Next instant that door was opened, revealing Miss Redgrave, in her dressing-gown.

"Ah, Polly—Tess, did I disturb you then?"

"No. We were awake. We heard you—"

"I am sorry. But I am just going round the house to see that there are no further developments. For, girls, I have just made another alarming discovery," the youthful mistress said, in great distress.

Tess and Polly stared, wondering what was coming now.

"I could not sleep," Miss Redgrave went on. "I had to get up at last, and take a look round, and when I was passing Myra Marshall's bedroom, I thought I would give her a look in."

"Yes?"

"In case she was feeling upset."

"Well?" questioned both girls excitedly.

"I found her bed empty—"

"No!"

"Her study, too. I went down to it at once, and she was not there," Miss Redgrave continued shakily.

Polly struck her hands together with an air of sudden conviction.

"She has slipped out on some tricky business or other—that is what it means!" she declared.

"I tell you, Miss Redgrave, that girl is not as innocent as she pretended to be!"

The mistress made a gesture that meant, "Speak softly, girls!"

"I am going back to my room to put my things on, and then have a good look round," she whispered. "Since you are out of your beds, you may like to join me?"

"Yes—oh, yes!"

"Very well, then," was her assenting murmur, as she turned to go.

In a few minutes, Polly and Tess met her on a landing below. They went to Myra's room, but could see nothing unusual there, except that the bed had not been slept in at all that night.

From there they went to her study; but that was all in order. So they softly roamed the whole

house through, and in a few minutes they discovered that a back door was unlocked.

"There you are!" Polly breathed triumphantly. "She has only slipped out on some mysterious errand, meaning to creep back presently. Let us wait, and she will come!"

From waiting half an hour—an hour—they were drawn into waiting until past two in the morning. And still the girl prefect was absent.

And, when another morning at last dawned upon the troubled inmates of the Priory, there was yet another baffling poser for the girls to debate.

Betty Barton, missing since yesterday morning. Madge and Paula, missing since yesterday evening. And now, where was Myra Marshall?

"It is terrible!" exclaimed Polly, over and over again. "How is this business going to end?"

How, indeed!

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

(You will want to know what happens to Betty, Madge and Paula; so don't miss next week's long complete Morcove Story, entitled "Tracked Down At Last!" It is full of thrilling incidents.)



COOKERY HINTS.

This Week: PEPPERMINT MARSHMALLOWS AND AUTUMN FUDGE.

"AND Tom's promised to do a few conjuring tricks," I remarked to May. "He got lots of tips from a professional whom he met this summer whilst on holidays."

May and I were discussing a little social evening that I was shortly giving to some schoolgirl friends.

Of course May was coming, and we were having music as well as the conjuring and—last but not least—refreshments.

The discussion of the latter occupied quite a long time. Mother promised to provide the cake and sandwich part, but lemonade and other little things she left to us to arrange.

"We must have some sweets to pass round during the evening," said May.

"Of course," I agreed, "but buying sweets for such a crowd will make a big hole in our pocket money for the next few weeks. We must make them."

So the sweets of the evening were home-made—Peppermint Marshmallows and Autumn Fudge.

How to Make Peppermint Marshmallows.

Required: Four ounces of granulated sugar, one ounce of gum arabic, half a teaspoonful of peppermint essence, and the white of one egg.

Put the gum arabic into a basin, and pour over it three-quarters of a gill of boiling water. Stir until the gum dissolves.

Strain the liquid through a very fine strainer, or piece of muslin, into another basin, and stand the basin in a saucepan of boiling water.

Add the sugar to the dissolved gum, and when the sugar is quite melted, beat the white of egg and add it with the peppermint essence to the other ingredients.

Remove the basin from the saucepan, and whisk the mixture until it is quite white and frothy.

Sprinkle a flat tin liberally with fine icing sugar, turn the mixture into the tin, and stand in a cool place for three or four hours.

Cut the peppermint marshmallows into square shapes with a sharp knife, roll each piece in fine icing sugar, and store the sweets in an air-tight tin until required.

Small Quantities at First.

"Now that we've made some successful marshmallows from small quantities of ingredients," said May, rolling each delicious morsel into a drift of fine white sugar, "we'll use large quantities to-morrow and make more sweets."

"Yes, it's always best to use small quantities when trying a new recipe for the first time," I agreed.

How to Make Autumn Fudge.

Required: Half a teacupful of castor sugar, half a teacupful of brown sugar, a quarter of an ounce of butter, half a teacupful of new milk, one teaspoonful of vinegar, and half a teacupful of honey.

Put the sugar and milk into a saucepan and boil together until a little of the mixture when dropped into cold water will easily roll into a ball between two fingers.

Add the honey and boil again until the mixture will roll into a ball, add the butter and vinegar, and bring to the boil again.

Pour the mixture into a greased flat tin, and when cold break the fudge into small pieces.

On the evening of the party, when we told our friends that we had really made the sweets ourselves, they were as surprised as they were over Tom's conjuring tricks.

ANSWERS

EVERY MONDAY....PRICE 2: