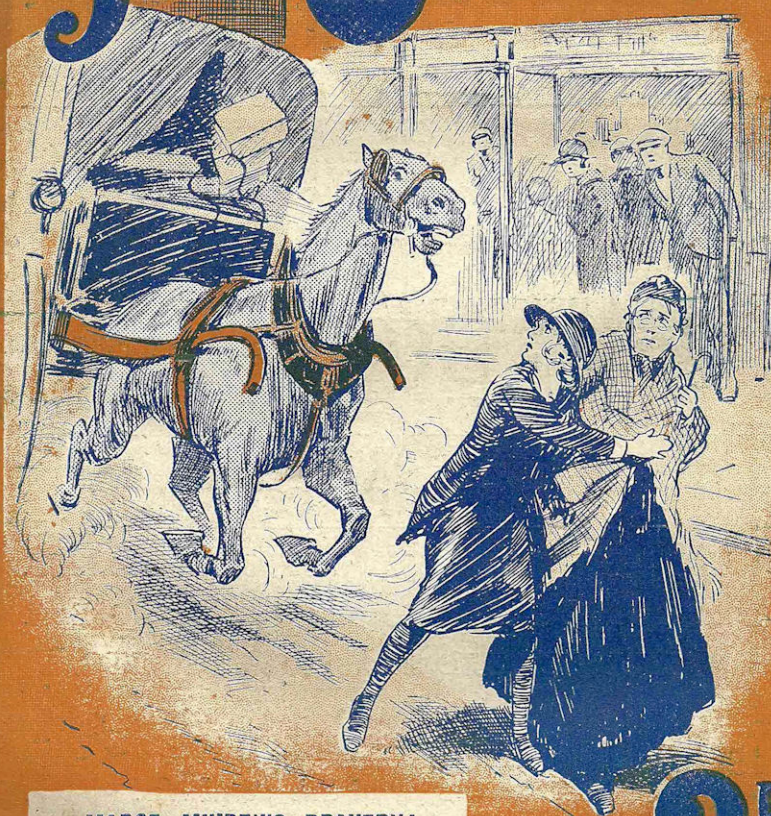


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BETTY BARTON'S  
STUDY

# The Schoolgirl's Own



**MADGE MINDEN'S BRAVERY!**

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

2<sup>d</sup>

The First of a splendid new series of "Morcove" stories, featuring that popular member of the Fourth—Musical Madge Minden.



# TOO BAD TO TAUNT HER!

A Magnificent new long complete story of the girls of Morcove School. They are still in their temporary quarters at The Old Priory, but as full of fun as ever.

By MARJORIE STANTON.

## Mr. Minden Speaks His Mind

"MADGE, my dear!" It almost seemed as if the gentle call had fallen upon deaf ears. At any rate, Madge Minden, seated at the piano in the bright drawing-room of her home in Exeter, kept her eyes upon the folio of music, whilst her tireless fingers played on as unerringly as ever.

But these were the last majestic chords of a great classic that Madge was crashing off. The moment her hands went down in a final burst of notes, she looked round to the doorway.

Her father was there, regarding her with a queer sort of look—a mixture of pride and disapproval.

"Does my music bother you, dad?"

"It doesn't happen to be interfering with my work at present, dear. But, come to my den a moment, will you?"

Madge slipped to her feet from the music-stool; a fine, dark-haired, dark-eyed girl, full of character and spirit.

Buoiant of step, she passed from the drawing-room and across the hall, following the best of all fathers—for so Madge held him to be—into his book-crammed study. She was humming the sonata that she had just been firing off as she closed the door.

"You are in an awful state in here, as usual, dad!" she said lightly, starting to put a few things straight. "One would think you had been hurling books at the pictures because my playing was driving you crazy."

"Not quite as bad as that—yet," he returned grimly.

"Anyhow, to-morrow," she rejoined consolingly, "you'll be rid of me once more. A little peace for you when I'm back at Morcove School."

"That's all very well," he smiled back at her. "But, joking apart, Madge dear, this music of yours—"

"Do you know what that piece was, dad?"

"I do not; and I'm afraid I should be none the wiser if you told me, Madge. Very—er—clever, no doubt; but—"

"Clever! Oh, dad, find a better word for it than that. How I must have been murdering it, for you to think it only clever!"

"My dear, I have not the least doubt you were playing it beautifully," he answered, resting a hand upon her shoulders. "Only—this is really

what I have been wanting to have a word with you about for some time now—don't you think, Madge, you are rather overdoing it?"

"The music? But I love it, dad! It's in me!"

"It's in you—yes, I suppose it is. And I wish it wouldn't come out quite so much!" he remarked ruefully. "Now, listen a moment, and don't look so horror-struck, my dear! This is all meant kindly."

He settled her in a comfortable armchair, and walked to the table after giving a caress to her glossy dark hair.

"I have a daughter," he said, "who could do lots of other things quite creditably, if she chose. But here she is, growing up all for music—music, and more music after that!"

"Well, dad, if it's a crime," Madge said, with a pretty grimace, "I am sorry!"

"Oh, it is not a crime!" he laughed. "The question is, though, whether it is not a bit of a mistake—a mistake, my dear, that may have direful consequences by and by!"

"Why, dad, how funny you should take that view!" Madge exclaimed, with a mirthless chuckle. "Isn't it just as well for a girl to be able to do one thing well?"

"Certainly, my dear; but not music!"

"Not? Why, surely, music is the very thing."

"As a drawing-room accomplishment—yes, my dear," he allowed, and then paused, for Madge was pouting again.

"If there is anything I dislike," she said, "it is to hear music spoken of as a sort of parlour trick! But there, I know what you are, dad, darling. You don't really know what music is!"

"No, my dear," he confessed, passing a hand over his smooth hair, "you certainly don't inherit your musical genius from me. I've as much music in me as the leg of that chair! All the same, some of the most musical people would be the very first to warn you off living for your music, and counting upon music to provide you with a living in return, if ever you should come to want!"

"Gracious, father," Madge said, in mock alarm, "have you been losing all your money just lately?"

"No, my dear—oh, no! You have nothing like that to worry about, I am thankful to say. And yet, once again, and joking apart, supposing



something did happen at any time? You know how things do—"

"Yes, dad—oh, yes!" she exclaimed, in sudden great earnestness. "And now we have stopped joking and are serious, I—I may as well say, father, darling, you would soon find me turning to, if we came to grief."

"Ah, my girl, don't I know it? How you love your old father, even though he is not a musician!" He patted her very tenderly again. "But you talk about turning to, if ever the need should arise. Does that mean turning to at music?"

"Yes, dad, of course!"

He gave a derisive laugh that slightly nettled her.

"Forgive me, Madge! But there it is; my little girl simply does not realise that she is devoting herself, heart and soul, to a thing that can, at the best, bring her only a pittance as a profession. It is one of the arts, Madge! And they are all alike. Painting, authorship, music—they are no good to anybody as a means of livelihood!"

"But, dad—"

"Ah, we don't want to argue ourselves out of breath about it," he exclaimed, with returning cheerfulness. "All I want is, Madge dear—before you go back to Mercove School after your week-end at home—to suggest, for your own dear sake, that you do just cut down the music in future, and go a bit harder at all-round subjects."

She had stood up, looking rather distressed, in spite of the forced smile that curved her lips.

"It is all right, dad, darling," she said, just a little on her dignity. "I am not so conceited as to suppose that I would ever get my fifty guineas a night for playing at Queen's Hall! Only, people do surely find music a help now and then, when the need arises? How about teaching?"

"What, music lessons?" He laughed again. "My dear, I'd much rather know you were able to use a typewriter and go out as a lady-clerk! Take my word for it, Madge, music is all right in the right place—the drawing-room. But—"

"Oh, you horrid old father!" she said, kissing him. "All right; I'll slog away at maths, and languages; and book-keeping! But I don't promise not to touch the piano, because, dad, I couldn't give it up—oh, I couldn't!" she exclaimed, with such a sudden return to great gravity that he looked quite alarmed.

"My dear, I am not asking you to give it up—the idea! No, no; only abandon any notion that it might at any time be a means of livelihood, because thousands of disappointed musicians will tell you that there's not a penny in it!"

He saw her out of the room in his affectionate way, then turned back to his work with an air of having got that off his chest anyhow—"that" being his dear girl's positive mania for music.

Madge, for her part, promptly gravitated to

the drawing-room, taking her stand in front of the piano.

Her right hand went down to the keys, and she very nearly struck a few notes, checking herself just in time with a "No, I mustn't!" smile.

So then she took the volume of music off the piano, and began to read all about the lives of the composers in the preface.

A tragic batch of lives, to be sure! After what her father had said—all the cold water he had thrown upon the fond belief that music could be a means of livelihood at any time, if necessary—it really was awful to find out what dreadful paupers most of the great musicians had been!

When she got to one particularly depressing paragraph, telling how one of the greatest musicians the world had ever known received a pauper's funeral in Vienna, she thought that was about enough for one day. So she went upstairs to her room, and began to think about packing for to-morrow. She would be meeting a lot of the girls at Exeter Station, and would return with them.

In the midst of her happy task, she suddenly heard a flute-player tooting down the middle of the quiet road.

First she darted to the window, and looked out upon him; then she whirled downstairs and out of the house, to give him a coin.

Shabby, destitute—oh, how awful it was to see him so, when he could play so beautifully!

"Thank you so much for that bit of 'Tannhäuser,'" she said, after slipping her half-crown into his hand. "I wonder you aren't in an orchestra!"

"I was," he said; "and I may be again, if I live long enough. These are hard times for musicians. Thank you, miss!"

And he doffed his hat to her, like the gentleman he was.

Madge went back to the house, to find her father in the front doorway.

"You gave him a decent tip, dear? That's right. Poor beggar! But doesn't it all prove what I said, little girl?"

She murmured sadly, and went up to her room, sighing.

"What's the Matter With Madge?"

"G EALS," said Paula Creel, brushing crumbs from her lap, as she sat in a first-class compartment of the afternoon train from Exeter to Barncombe. "I feel wewfeshed!"

"That's a blessing!" laughed Betty Barton, the captain of the Fourth Form. "It is not nice to see you looking as if our glorious day-trip to see the cathedral had left you prostrate!"

"I quite agree!" said Paula affably. "And naow, if you will just tell me that my hair is quite all right—"

"Perfect, dear!" chuckled Polly Linton. "It doesn't look a bit sticky with the lemonade I squirted at you—by accident, you know."

"Accident or—the wewerse," Paula said. "It was a most disagreeable experience! How-eh-ah, this being a pleasure twip, one must allow for a little frivolity. Yes, wather!"

"Here is a girl who is not frivolous," Tess Trelawney said, flinging aside a magazine to give her left-hand neighbour, Madge Minden, a poke in the ribs. "Cheer up, Madge!"

"Yes, wather! Madge dear, one would wather imagine your week-end at home in Exeter has left you depressed!"

"Anyhow, you'll soon be rattling away at the

Have you Secured your

:: :: Copy of :: ::

"THE  
SCHOOLGIRLS'  
WEEKLY?"

music-room piano, Madge!" cried Polly. "You know, dear! Umpty, tumpy, tiddle-ee-ee!"

This was chanted by Polly, whilst she played an imaginary rhapsody on an imaginary piano.

"Haow frivolous you are, Polly deah!" Paula rebuked her. "Howevah—"

"Voila—behold!" sang out Trixie Hope, airing her alleged French. "There's Barncombe church-steepie, anyhow!"

"Yes, wather! Bai Jove!"

"Pip, pip, hooray!" shouted Polly. "Now we sha'n't be long! Paula—all of you—that snack just now didn't count, did it? I mean, tea for all, at Barncombe!"

"Yes, wather! And pway wecollect, geals, I wish to stand tweat!"

The train swung round the curve just outside Barncombe Junction, causing all the girls to sway violently. Peals of laughter went up, waxing louder when Polly, pretending she could not help it, fairly squashed Paula flat.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Healp!" wailed the swell girl of the Fourth Form. "Pway remember my fwock, Polly deah! You are cwushing me, bai Jove!"

"Order—order!" appealed Betty merrily. "You don't hear other girls carrying on like this!"

But it appeared that Betty was wrong, as she probably knew herself to be. At any rate, when they quieted for a moment, they distinctly heard peals of laughter and much shrill talk coming from other compartments of the train.

Then the brakes went on, and up jumped Betty and Co. Another minute, and they were all part of the flood of schoolgirl humanity which was surging towards the fine refreshment-room at Barncombe Station.

"Half an hour for the train to Morcove Road!" Betty remarked, having gleaned the news from a porter. "Time for that cup of tea Paula has promised us!"

"I'm longing for a cup of tea!" said Trixie Hope. "Don't forget it's a little longer journey to the Old Priory, now that the poor old school's burnt out. We shall only just be back in time for supper."

"Yes, wather!"

Paula was one of those amiable, affectionate girls who are never so happy as when they are playing hostess to others. Looking as band-boxy as ever, she was trying to get ahead of the rest of her party with that mincing step of hers, when she suddenly checked, hearing her name called sweetly.

"Hallo, Paula, darling!"

It was Audrey Blain. She had been in the next-door compartment to Betty and Co.'s, during the return journey from Exeter; but now she was waiting to link up with those girls again.

"Pway come and have a cup of tea with us!" said the good-natured Paula. "Bai Jove, and we must take care to keep togethah, geals! Madge—wheah is Madge!"

Madge was gone.

All in a moment she must have slipped away from her chums; but they were not going to let her sudden absence trouble them. They guessed she had only run along to see after her week-end luggage from the guard's van.

But Madge, as a matter of fact, was by now outside the station. Quickly she was making for the narrow High Street of this quaint old country town.

A certain book-shop seemed to be her objective, for when she came to this establishment she dived

inside, with every sign of being anxious to get served quickly.

"You receive advertisements for the local paper?" she asked the young lady who was behind the counter.

"Yes; and any for this week's issue should be in by to-night," Madge was informed.

"Will you please see that this appears?" she said, rather nervously, handing over a written sheet of paper. "And how much is it—can you tell me?"

The book-shop girl counted the words.

"One-and-six for a single issue; half a crown for three, please!"

Madge handed over the half-crown, smiled her thanks for the prompt attention in a rather agitated way, and hurried away.

Back to the station she meant to race, that was evident; but now Fate, in very strange human guise, intervened.



**TEASING MADGE!** "Whatever's that awful bit of music you're playing, Madge?" asked Polly provokingly. Madge looked up. "You know nothing about music, Polly!" she retorted spiritedly.

She was on the point of crossing the roadway, when a lot of shouts and yells suddenly dinned in her ears, mingling with the mad clatter of a runaway horse.

"Look out, there!" fifty people were yelling. And for just a second, so abstracted had the schoolgirl been, she had the flustered feeling that she herself must be in danger.

Then she saw that the warning shouts were for at least half a dozen people—girls and women, all of them—who had been caught at this unlucky moment in the very middle of the street.

Some looked like losing their heads; and Madge,

too, voiced an alarmed cry, seeing the wild confusion that prevailed.

And then her whole attention concentrated upon one frightened person, a little, shabby woman, who had fallen down, right in the path of the onrushing horse.

Other people doubtless started to rush to the rescue, but somehow it was Madge who got there first.

In a flash she was out in the roadway, had raised the woman, and was dragging her clear of the stampeding runaway, as he went thundering past with a laden van pitching and rolling behind him.

Madge lurched back to the pavement, drawing the terrified woman with her, and the crowd instantly gathered around, shutting out all sight and sound of the runaway's further progress.

In a few moments, however, word came to Madge's ears that the frightened creature had been pulled up by a plucky policeman.

"Thank goodness!" she exclaimed. "And you are all right now, aren't you?" she added, with a rather ghastly smile at this queer little woman who had nearly been run over.

The poor soul looked into Madge's eyes with a dazed expression, whilst she simply said, "Eh?"

For a few moments the girl thought the woman was merely bewildered by the dreadful scare; then a word from her companion enlightened her.

"I am very deaf," explained the woman. "I know I ought not to be about in the busy streets alone. I don't hear anything coming, you see."

"How awkward for you—horrid!" Madge exclaimed in a louder voice, with genuine feeling.

"Shall I see you safely into a quiet street, then? Let me, please! I can spare the time."

"Thank you, my dear!" was the poor woman's grateful cry. "I could manage alone, no doubt; but I would like to have a chance to thank you properly, all the same. You saved my life!"

"Oh, that's nothing to bother about, anyhow," Madge said, with a modest laugh. "Round this corner?"

"Yes, my dear."

And the woman named the part of the town where she lived—one of the poorest quarters, Madge knew, but perfectly respectable.

Now that she had conducted the old lady out of the teeming High Street, there really was no need for the girl to go any further with her. Yet Madge, as she took stock of her companion by means of swift side-glances, felt her interest increased.

It was not merely that the quaint little person, in her shabby clothes, made that claim for sympathy which proud poverty always creates. Vaguely the schoolgirl realised that here was a personality; that the shabby clothes covered a spirit which had fought some great fight against adversity, and had been beaten at last—beaten, but not destroyed!

"May I ask who are you, please?" Madge felt

emboldened to inquire, overcome with curiosity.

"I? If you lived in Barncombe, my dear," answered the woman, "you would surely know! I sometimes think, by the way the errand boys look at me, when I go by, they have a name for me. Crazy Jane, perhaps—you know what boys are!"

And she laughed tolerantly.

"Do I look quite as bad as that, though?" she went on, with a quizzing look at Madge.

"You look—I have been thinking all this time—you look—clever!" Madge said.

"There!" was the pleased comment. "Well, my dear, perhaps you are right, and perhaps the errand boys are right as well! I have been clever enough to earn my bread-and-butter for the fifty years I have been all alone in the world. And I have been crazy enough to think I might someday make my very fortune!"

It was rather strange talk, but Madge was not disquieted. She liked people who expressed themselves with any degree of originality.

"Make your fortune—what at?" she asked.

And the answer came:

"Music!"

#### Madge Minden's Experiment.

"WHEAL, I decaah, geals, it is a stwange thing, Madge disapeawing like this!"

Thus Paula Creel, as she sat at a small tea-table in the crowded refreshment-room of the railway-station.

"Yes," agreed Betty. "One can only suppose she slipped off to the High Street to buy something. That was nearly half an hour ago, however—"

"Yes, bai Jove! And— Hark! Theah's the bell winging for our twain to Morcove Wood! Wheah is Madge?"

Where was Madge, that she certainly had not materialised now that the local train was drawing into the station?

At that particular moment Madge was in the poky little parlour of the shabby woman's humble home, talking with that poor soul.

Vaguely, perhaps, Madge realised that she was missing the train for Morcove Road. If so, her default was not causing her much concern. She was far too taken up with talk about—music!

"Yes, my dear," the old lady was saying sadly, "it has been a struggle all my life, and I suppose I have been badly beaten in the end. When I think of all the great things I meant to do in life, and what a little I have really achieved! Shall I show you something—if you can stay a moment longer?"

"Yes, do! I am so interested! I—I love music; it is a passion with me!"

The old lady nodded, as if that was no news to her—as if she had already divined the girl's musical discipleship. She pulled open the drawer of a rickety bureau, and took out a thin sheaf of music, in manuscript.

"Oh!" was Madge's instant cry. "Your own composition? Let me see!"

"Yes, my dear," the poor soul confessed, with a rueful smile, as she handed over the composition.

On the outer page was written, "Woodland Symphony. By Agatha Ainley."

"That is your real name?" Madge exclaimed.

"Yes, my dear—Miss Ainley. A name that has never managed to figure in very big type! A name that has chiefly figured amongst the advertisements in local papers, for teaching the pianoforte!"

## "SISTERS, ALL ALONE!"

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ever written. See

"The Schoolgirls' Weekly."

Madge's lips parted again; but this time her exclamatory "Oh!" was a soundless one. She was suddenly thinking of the advertisement which she herself had handed in, only half an hour ago, to get pupils for the piano.

"That symphony of mine," the old lady said, regarding the dog-eared leaves with all an artist's pathetic love for a work that others have scoffed at, "it has never been played, and it never will be now!"

"I will play it!" Madge said; but evidently the deaf woman did not hear, for she pursued, in a resigned tone:

"I suppose the critics are right, and I am all wrong. It was foolish conceit on my part, to think I had achieved something that might live. I tried it round for months—years—hoping to get someone to take an interest in it; get it played just once before a critical audience, and then published. But no! And so, for years now, it has lain in that old bureau—"

"Miss Ainley—"  
"My poor symphony," the woman murmured on, "growing yellower with age and more tattered as the years have passed—years that have seen me earning just enough for bread-and-butter, by taking local pupils for the pianoforte. And now—"

She checked herself abruptly, and Madge guessed that she was bravely keeping back one of the worst features of her sad plight.

"You have lost your pupils, I suppose, owing to your deafness?" the schoolgirl hazarded; and then her companion nodded.

"Yes."  
She answered quickly, as if to keep off that painful subject.

"Would you like to keep my poor symphony, my dear? All I can give you, as a strange reward for the way you saved my life to-day! It has no value, that piece of music; I have been told that often enough to believe it by now! But, because it remains very dear to me, a part of myself, I—I would like you to take it."

"I would never dream of accepting it," Madge said earnestly. "But I would like the loan of it, so that I may learn to play it. And perhaps—perhaps, some day—"

For a moment Madge stood with a strange light in her dark eyes; then she went to the piano, set the music in front of her, and scanned the opening bars.

Sitting down, she began to play from sight. It was very difficult, for she was reading from manuscript; nor was the piano in good condition. Nevertheless, that dingy little parlour suddenly filled with a melody that the schoolgirl felt had some quality in it that was great.

Miss Ainley simply stood near by, watching with tragic calmness.

"I cannot hear it now, you see," she reminded Madge, when that girl suddenly looked round.

And then Madge could have wept. It was the tragedy of the great Beethoven all over again!

This poor woman, she would never hear music falling upon her ears again, although music was the passion of her life!

"Good-bye, then!" Madge was saying earnestly, quite ten minutes later.

What had been passing between the two during those last few minutes need not be set down here. Soon enough events would show what noble impulses had actuated the schoolgirl towards the close of this fateful interview. The piece of tattered music was carefully rolled up and held

in Madge's left hand, whilst she gave the other to Miss Ainley.

"You do not mean to tell me," that victim of life's cruel handicap said wistfully, "that you think anything at all of my symphony?"

"I am only a schoolgirl, and perhaps it seems like conceit," Madge answered. "But I flatter myself I know good music when I see and hear it. I should like to play this piece at Queen's Hall some day! And perhaps I shall—who knows?"

The thin hand that was still clasping hers trembled then. She looked into Miss Ainley's faded blue eyes, and saw how they shone with tears.

In a moment the grey-haired woman had controlled her emotions, and was making her last word a playful one.

"Take care!" she warned Madge, smiling. "You are very much like I was, at your age—and see what I am now! Be anything but a musician, my dear—"

"That is what my father says," laughed Madge. "But, can one help being a musician, if—if it is in one?"

"I ought not to say it," Miss Ainley answered, "but I don't believe they will ever make anything but a musician of you!"

"I don't believe they will either!" Madge rejoined, with another light laugh; and she hurried away with an amused look lingering in her eyes.

By and by, however, when she was in the later train to Morcove Road, for which she had had to wait half an hour, her expression was a sorer one indeed.

The girl was not looking miserable, only very grave. Her mind was running upon that talk with her father yesterday; but she could only have been miserable at this moment if he had stormed at her, as she supposed some fathers did storm at their rather trying daughters, sometimes. And there had been nothing like that at all.

He simply wished to impress her with his honest belief that music was a desirable accomplishment, but a very bad thing to depend upon for a livelihood, in any time of adversity. And she—well, she was simply longing for a chance to prove him wrong, just for fun!

And so this afternoon she had made the plunge. She had handed in that advertisement for the local paper, and if it brought her some replies from would-be pupils, she would just take them on.

All her plans were made—plans to ensure the whole venture remaining a close secret, although if her enterprise did ever become known to her chums and the mistresses, that would not be any terrible calamity. So she felt, at this moment, anyhow. It was not a thing that could get her expelled—gracious, no!

And, apart from being a good-humoured, yet spirited reply to her father's pessimistic warnings, the venture was going to serve a very practical purpose. The money that she—Madge—earned by giving lessons should go to poor Miss Ainley!

"But I mustn't forget my promise to dad, to go a bit harder at the maths, and the modern languages!" she suddenly reflected, sitting all alone in this fussy local train that was taking her on the last stage to the school. "Lef me see, now—"

The serene look was coming back to her handsome face, and a smile flickered at her red lips again.

"Maths., modern languages, and all the rest, as hard as I can go! Some hockey, too, or the



### SHE WANTED MUSIC LESSONS!

Madge opened the door of Miss Ainley's little cottage. Then she started back with amazement, for there stood Audrey Blain!

girls will be calling me a horrid, unsociable swot! Then the pupils—if I get any—and the Woodland Symphony to learn up until I get it perfect, in case there's a chance to play it in public! You have an exciting time before you, Madge, one way and another!

More than exciting, if only she could have known it!

How little, indeed, would she have been inclined to smile like this, in her light-hearted way, could she have known the ordeal that was in store for her during these last few weeks of the winter term!

#### The Scoffers.

IN the spacious study which Betty Barton and Polly Linton shared at the school's temporary quarters in the Priory, there was that pleasant clatter of cups and saucers proclaiming the laying of rather an elaborate table for visitors.

"How do we stand now, Betty?" was Polly Linton's jovial cry, as she came away from the study-larder with more things for the table.

"It is not a question of how we stand," chuckled the Form captain. "It is a question of how all the girls are going to sit down!"

"We shall manage," asserted Polly cheerfully. "We have been far more cramped for space, in our study at the dear old school, before the whole place was burnt out."

"Oh, yes," agreed Betty, just as gaily. "And if there are one or two extra guests this after-

noon—Audrey Blain, for one—we'll all fit in somehow."

Then in drifted Paula, who promptly sank into an easy-chair, and, a moment or two later, quite a crowd of girls came laughing and jostling into the cosy study.

"Weally, geals, it weally is wefweshing to see a wproper study wepast once more!" drawled Paula, in a satisfied tone. "They are wolling up, Betty!"

"Yes, only two more to come," answered the Form captain—"Audrey and Madge. Oh, here is Audrey!"

"Yes, here I am," that girl said, very sweetly, as she slipped into the room, and then stood in a rather posed attitude, as if aware of being a rather attractive figure.

"Bai Jove, what a we remarkably pwetty fwock, Audwey!" Paula exclaimed, sitting bolt upright for once. "Weally, you make me envious!"

"Only in a friendly way, I hope?" purred Audrey, slipping across and perching herself on an arm-rest of the easy-chair.

"Tea-ho!" sang out Polly. "So now, where's that Madge? Somebody find Madge, please!"

"I will," offered Dolly Delane, promptly diving out of the room.

Midway along the corridor she fetched up sharply and simply burst into one of the other studies, crying:

"Madge, they are waiting for you!"

Then Dolly stood suddenly abashed. She realised that this chum of hers was busy writing a letter, and that the sudden intrusion had flustered the girl.

Madge even gave an irritable:

"Bother you, Dolly!"

She hastily blotted the letter, and then fumbled with a newspaper that was close beside her on the table.

"I'm sorry, Madge—"

"All right, dear; I didn't mean to be cross," Madge struck in, with restored good humour. "Say I'll be along in a jiffy, will you? And don't let them wait, please!"

"Right-ho!"

And away went Dolly, taking care to shut the door more gently than she had opened it.

Barely five minutes later, Madge joined the happy gathering in the Form captain's study, her entry being the signal for cries of delight.

She wanted to apologise for being so late, but could not get a word in anyhow, Polly and Betty being, perhaps, the most demonstrative of all the girls.

"Your tea, Madge dear!" Betty sang out, as soon as the late-comer had taken her seat between Paula and Audrey.

"Bwown bwead, Madge deah, or white?" simpered Paula.

"Cream-bun, Madge? Or a jam-puff?" chimed in Polly. "Cheer up! You look—I don't know—sort of nery!"

"My belief is," said Tess darkly, "Madge came back from the Friday to Tuesday at home, determined to swot for the rest of the term!"

"My belief, too!" grinned Polly. "You knew all your French this morning, Madge!"

"Quite a change for me, isn't it?" she smiled.

"Maths., too?"

"Oh, well—"

"So long as you don't overdo it," said Betty lightly. "But when a girl is crazed on music, as you are, I don't think she ought to expect to



shine at other subjects, or want to. Her life wouldn't be worth living!"

"Bai Jove, no!" agreed Paula. "Take my own case. Wealising that my stwong point is to look respectable, I wegard it as my duty to go all out for a pwsentable appeawance—yes, wather!"

"And it is pretty certain, Madge, you don't want to neglect the music all of a sudden," cried Etta Hargrove, "when there is that annual music festival coming along at Barncombe!"

"Hear, hear!" said Betty. "The school will expect you to do something special at the festival, Madge. I can see it in the programme: 'Pianoforte solo—some symphony-thing, or whatever you call it—by Madge Minden.'"

Madge gave a short laugh.

"Can't we talk about something besides music?" she inquired genially.

"Yes, I can," Betty promptly answered, "To-morrow—Saturday—another halfer!"

"Hoo-way—yes, wather!"

"And another hockey match," went on the Form captain. "You are down to play, Madge. The Priory field, three pip-emmer, sharp!"

"Look at her!" sang out Polly merrily. "Now she is not happy! She is going to tell us she has a previous engagement, I do believe!"

Madge certainly looked very embarrassed again. Once again, too, she was turning quite pale.

But she stirred her tea, drank it, and finished her cream-bun, without going into the question of whether she could play or not. Only when the whole tea-party had risen from the table, and was slowly dispersing, did she take Betty aside and beg to be left out of to-morrow's team.

Betty looked as surprised as she was disappointed.

"But, Madge—"

"Oh, Betty, don't make a fuss, please, or we shall have all the Form talking about nothing else!" Madge pleaded, with a forced laugh. "Just do it as a favour, will you? It is not that I am off hockey, or don't want to back up the Form. I—I really have—"

"A previous engagement!"

"Well, yes, it amounts to that," Madge had to admit, in slight confusion.

The talk ended there. After a brief silence, Betty gave a nod that implied, "Very well, dear." And then Madge effaced herself from a study that still held a remnant of the tea-party.

Back in her own den, she sat down hastily to some further correspondence, as if anxious not to miss the post.

There were two letters she had answered before tea, and her replies were ready for dispatch. Now she glanced at a third letter.

Unlike the other two missives—both replies to her advertisement in the local paper—this one was from a girl who seemed to be nicely placed in life. The notepaper was a good stout one, and subtly perfumed. Perhaps because Audrey Blain was fond of scent, Madge pictured the writer of the letter as being a girl of Audrey's standing, with some of Audrey's "swank."

Madge kept the letter at her elbow, whilst she wrote her reply with rather nervous haste:

"I thank you for your letter, which duly reached me after being delivered at the address given in my advertisement.

"I note that you wish to take a special course of advanced lessons for the pianoforte, and that you would like to know my terms, etc. If you will call to see me to-morrow afternoon—Saturday—at three-thirty, I shall be pleased to talk things

over. My address for giving lessons is Myrtle Villa, Parish Place, Barncombe."

Then Madge addressed an envelope. Her swagger correspondent was remaining a mystery for the present; there were only two initials for a name—"A. B."—and the address was: Care of the Library, High Street, Barncombe.

"A. B.—that's funny!" Madge said to herself, as she took a final glance at the address. "Of course, they are the first letters of the alphabet; but they might stand for Audrey Blain!"

Next minute she was on her way downstairs to the hall letter-box, just in time for the evening collection.

"Hallo, Madge, darling!" Audrey said, coming up behind her, with a letter of her own for the post. "My word, you have been busy—three, did I see you posting? And what are you doing, now that that job is finished?"

"Prep., I suppose!" Madge grimaced.

"Oh, yes—prep., of course!" Audrey responded, pouting. "But afterwards, Madge?"

"There's a bit of music I want to learn up, and so—"

"Won't you come to my study for an odd half-hour? I wish you would!" Audrey begged.

But Madge, thinking of that symphony, shook her head.

"Thank you, Audrey; not this evening, though."

And, as soon as her prep. was finished, down she ran to the music-room, provided herself with a light, and took her place at the piano.

For a full hour she remained there, undisturbed, getting more and more of a mastery over the



**TOO POOR TO PAY!** All Madge's sympathy was aroused. Very gently she closed Maggie's purse for her. "I'll teach you for nothing, Maggie," she said.



difficult manuscript music, and feeling all the time completely under its spell.

"Wonderful, I call it!" she murmured to herself, when at last she was thinking of finishing for the evening.

Suddenly she realised that there was quite a crowd of girls at the door of the music-room.

"Madge," said one of the girls—it was Polly—in a sort of choked tone, "whatever is that awful bit of music you've been tinkling at?"

"You don't know anything about music, Polly—"

"If that is music, Madge—well, I don't want to know anything about it," was Polly's good-humoured retort. "We girls, we've been getting quite alarmed! We had to come down—"

"Yes, wather! Howevah—"

"Is that the piece you mean to learn up for the festival?" Betty broke in, as Madge came across to them all.

"If so, anybody can have my seat in the audience!" chuckled Polly. "Music! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Madge, you mustn't make that piece your choice!" urged Tess, quite tragically. "It will spoil all your chances of getting the prize!"

"Madge, you stick to that piece if you think it good!" Audrey counter-advised sweetly. "I would!"

"I certainly shall!" said Madge, marching on past them all, with the rolled-up music in her grasp.

And then—no one noticed it, but a sudden, faint smile of satisfaction quivered at Audrey Blain's lips.

Perhaps to avoid a glance from other's eyes, she, too, walked away, keeping quite to herself all the way to her own den.

Arrived there, she shut herself in, and then gave free play to her strange, joyful feelings.

"Oh, it's great!" she said to herself delightedly. "If Madge sticks to that awful piece for the festival, then it gives me all the better chance of pulling off the prize—a prize that will make me the most popular girl in the school!"

#### Oh, What a Surprise!

**A**FTER dinner next day—Saturday—Madge Minden was off and away on her bicycle to Barncombe.

Swiftly she pedalled along, trying to get to the town in record time. For, no mistake about it, her work for the afternoon was "cut out"!

Those letters posted overnight had pledged her to four interviews with potential music-pupils. It had seemed unwise to see them all in a batch, and so she had spread the four meetings over two hours.

Luckily, Madge's cycle behaved itself; no punctures en route! And she had the satisfaction of reaching Miss Ainley's shabby little home at a quarter to three.

There was nowhere to leave a cycle, except close to the house wall; but this drawback did not give Madge much concern. Hers was certainly a new machine that might easily be recognised by any of her chums. But what Morocco scholar would be penetrating to this poor quarter of the town to-day?

"Four possible pupils coming to see you, my dear!" was old Miss Ainley's incredulous comment on what Madge told her. "Well, to be sure! What a start to have made!"

"Not bad, is it?" Madge returned, pulling off her gloves, now that she had been admitted to

the dingy front-parlour. "You quite understand, Miss Ainley, I am only doing this in answer to a sort of challenge—partly for fun. The money is nothing to me."

"Just so, my dear. All the same—"  
"Whatever I earn, Miss Ainley, I shall insist upon your taking, as I said yesterday, in return for the use of this room for giving lessons. I—"

Rur-rat, tat-tat, tat-tat! came a double knock at the door, and Madge fairly jumped.

"Goodness! Is that one of my pupils already? I said three o'clock for the first, and it is still ten-to. She is early."

Miss Ainley made no remark. She had been looking rather bewildered, even before that loud rat-tat smote upon her bad hearing. Now she grew quite flustered.

"I—I am sure I don't know what to do!" she stammered at last. "I mean, would you like me to open the door to your callers, or shall I just keep out of everything?"

"Miss Ainley, I'll do everything, thank you," Madge exclaimed.

She hated the idea of this poor soul playing the part of door attendant at the "Madge Minden Academy of Music"!

Rat-tat, tat-tat! came the imperative knock again.

Then Miss Ainley simply faded away into her tidy kitchen at the rear of the tiny dwelling-house, whilst Madge, taking a grip on herself, went to the front door.

She snicked back the catch, drew the door wide open, and then—

"Oh!" she gasped.  
For there, on the doorstep, stood Audrey Blain!

"Madge!" gasped Audrey, just as surprised, staggered, as the other girl.

"Audrey, I—I—"

"But—but what does it mean, Madge?" Audrey exclaimed. "This house—it is a music-teacher's place. I am here by appointment. I—you—Are you learning music here, too?"

"No. You see—Oh, come inside, Audrey," flattered Madge, all to pieces for the moment.

"I—The fact is—"  
"Madge, I do believe I know what it means, without being told!" Audrey burst out, stepping into the little parlour. "You are giving the music lessons! It is your advertisement that I answered!"

It would have been useless Madge trying to deny it, even if her regard for truth had not made a denial out of the question. She was crimson-cheeked with the point-blank "accusation."

Up to now, Audrey had looked just as staggered as Madge. Now she recovered some of her usual composure; began to look more the bold, airy-mannered Audrey that the Form knew so well.

"Well," she threw out, with a shrug and a laugh, "I have nothing to be ashamed about—oh, no! I wanted to improve my music, on account of the music festival, and so I answered that advertisement. That's all! But you, Madge—well, fancy giving lessons!"

"I don't know that I have anything to be ashamed of either," Madge said, put upon her mettle by the other's slight suggestion of scorn.

"Why are you doing it, though, Madge? Simply for the money?"

"That's my business!"

"Oh, indeed?"

Audrey gave a sudden ripple of laughter.

"Will you have me for a pupil, then, Madge? Not at this awful hole, but at the school? I really want to make headway with the piano, Madge."

"On account of the festival?"

Madge did not put the question at all jealously; but Audrey suddenly coloured.

Then she carried it off with a laugh.

"I don't mind telling you, Madge, I really am a rival of yours for the festival. You are the school's great pianist, of course; still—"

"I have always admired your playing, Audrey," Madge broke in, with no trace of envy whatever. "I hope you will do your best to compete for that prize. And it was quite smart of you to hit upon the idea of getting secret music-lessons!"

"Well, I shall have to go somewhere else for lessons now," shrugged Audrey. She was keenly conscious of having been nicely "bowled out," yet she managed to laugh lightly. "I can't expect my great rival to coach me, can I?"

There was a moment's silence; then Madge said, quite soberly:

"I will give you some advanced lessons, Audrey, to the best of my ability—"

"What?"

"Certainly. But you will have to pay me!"

Audrey looked staggered again.

"Well," she gasped at last, "what a peculiar girl, to be sure! All right, though. If you choose to sink your dignity by accepting money from a schoolfellow— But perhaps you are asking payment merely as a hint that I am not a friend?"

"Oh, no!" said Madge serenely.

"Would you ask payment from Betty Barton, or Polly Linton, or Paula Creel?"

"Certainly. I would take on the whole Form for special coaching at the piano, in return for their fees. My terms, Audrey, are the same for everybody—eighteenpence per hour."

"Indeed!" Audrey said, as dryly as she could. "Oh, all right! I'll get you to give me two lessons a week, at the school, at that price, and—"

She broke off, as a rather startling thing happened.

Someone going by on the pavement paused close to the window, and peered in.

In a moment the impudent person had gone on again; but in that one moment both Madge and Audrey had recognised the face that was pressed close to the window.

"Cora Grandways!" came in a sharp whisper from Audrey. "You saw her, Madge? That girl!"

"Yes!" Madge spoke with grim quietness. "How does she come to be spying here? She is a horn sneak and spy, we know. But—"

"I can tell you," Audrey panted. "I ran up against her in the town, just as I was coming away from the book-shop, where I had been to get the letter in answer to mine. I told her I didn't want her with me, and so she must have followed me here!"

Before Madge could answer, the window was again darkened by the figure of Cora Grandways, and once again her inquisitive face was pressed close to the glass.

Boldly she took a long look into the room, gripping impudently as she first met the eyes of Audrey Blain, and then Madge Minden's.

Then she stepped away, to take her stand in front of the street door.

Rat, tat-tat! came her deliberate knock.

"Whatever will you do?" panted Audrey. "Shall you let her come in? Are you going to tell her?"

"I must," said Madge. "It'll be all the same if I don't!"

Only a Step-girl.

"WHATEVER is all the mystery about?" Cora Grandways was exclaiming, only half a minute later. "I wondered what on earth you, Audrey, were dodging off to this part of the town for. And now, here is Madge Minden—here, in a horrid little villa—"

"Be careful what you say, Cora!" Audrey said, with mock severity. "This is the Madge Minden Academy of Music—ha, ha, ha!"

"Wha-a-a-at!" screeched Cora.

Audrey turned to Madge.

"Shall I tell her, or will you, Madge?"

"If it amuses you, Audrey, you can do the talking," Madge shrugged. "But don't keep Cora long. I've other people coming!"

"Other— Well," said Cora, and she flopped into a chair, "this is a queer go!"

Then Audrey, in a tone that was tinged with superciliousness, smilingly let Cora into the whole business, leaving that girl staring in the most astounded way.

It was at least five minutes before Cora would take Audrey's words seriously; and then, convinced that Madge really was out to teach girls the piano for so much a lesson, she was simply one great "Why?"

Cora gloried in finding anybody "on the rocks." If Madge had had to admit that her people had lost all their money, and she was trying in a desperate way to earn some cash, she would have been really joyful.

But Madge had no reason like that to give. She as good as told Cora to mind her own business, and that left Cora "rattled."

"Oh, well," said Cora disdainfully, "if you like to lower yourself like this—because it really is a loss of self-respect, isn't it, Audrey?"

"I should not care to do it myself," owned Audrey sweetly. "For money—no!"

"Eighteenpence a lesson!" cried Cora. "Oh, all right! I'll take you on, Madge. I am going in for the pianoforte diploma at the festival, and so—"

"Cora," broke in Madge, very quietly, "I don't think you had better waste your money, paying me to coach you. Because you aren't musical; and as for getting the diploma, you might just as well try to get the moon!"

"You think so, do you?" flared up Cora. "If that's how you are going to talk to would-be pupils, I can't see you making your fortune!"

"Ha, ha, ha! No!" agreed Audrey.

"If a girl is musical, I'll not be one to damp her enthusiasm," said Madge. "But you—you had much better be advised by me, Cora—"

"Well, I'm not going to be!" cried that girl. "Question is, are you going to have me for a pupil, or are you going to refuse me? You say you want to rope in all you can—"

"So I do!"

"Very well, then," Cora rushed on, with malicious glee, "I'll have eighteen penn'orth every day! Oh, my, what a joke it is! How the girls will laugh!"

"What will Madge care if they do, so long as they pay up?" grinned Audrey. "But let's hope none of the mistresses get to know, or—Hallo, another knock at the door!" she broke off, as a very hesitant rat-tat sounded.

"More customers—I beg pardon; clients—pupils!" chuckled Cora. "Hem! Good-afternoon then, Miss Minden, and thank you so much! I'll have my eighteen penn'orth before brekker, to-morrow!"

"What a scream it is, really!" Audrey tittered, going with Cora to the street door. "I wonder what the other clients will be like?"

She opened the door, and there on the step stood a girl—not a schoolgirl—who offended all Audrey's ideas of how to dress.

"Ugh!" shuddered Audrey, walking off with Cora. "Did you see it?"

"I did! And Madge will put up with her even, for eighteenthence an hour! Oh, my word, talk about a come-down!"

Madge, it may be said at once, neither took to her latest caller, nor came to terms with her. It turned out that the girl wanted to haggle for lower terms. Madge stuck out for eighteenthence an hour. The girl said then that she would think it over. And so she went away, just as another would-be pupil plied the street-door knocker.

A very different caller, this time!

She was young enough to be still at school; but Madge found out that Maggie Shaw—for that was her name—had been taken away from the Council School six months ago, by her father.

"Mother's dead," said the girl, standing shyly there, in her shabby clothes, with Madge's compassionate eyes upon her, "and so I have to do about the house for father, and in my spare time I go to other people's homes."

"To work?"

"Yes, miss; cleaning the brass, and the steps, and such-like."

She had all the appearance, indeed, of being nothing else than a poor little drudge.

"And yet you can find time to go in for music?" Madge exclaimed admiringly.

"I want to get on at it, miss—yes, ever so much!" was the wistful answer. "I got a little teaching at the piano at school, and oh, I do so want to keep it up! I—Somehow, miss, it's in me, if you can understand?"

Could Madge understand?

"Only too well, Maggie! And I'll take you in hand—oh, I shall love to have you for a pupil! The fees, though—"

"I—I think I can get the money together, miss. I—I'm going to have a good try, anyhow," said the poor girl earnestly. "I've got my first eighteenthence now, miss, if—if you'd like to have it before it goes!"

That was enough for Madge's tender heart. She simply shut up the girl's purse for her, and then kissed her.

"Maggie, I'll teach you for nothing," she said.

"Oh, miss!"

"Yes. Why, if I get you on well, it may lead to wonderful things!" exclaimed Madge, grieving to think of the hard, drab life this motherless little soul had to lead. "My father laughs at the idea of anyone hoping to earn a good living at music. But it must be better than step-cleaning!"

She added gently:

"By the way, what is your father, Maggie?"

"I—I can't say he is anything, miss," was the rather sad answer. "I never know what he is doing, which rather puzzles me sometimes."

It puzzled Madge at this moment. Fancy this girl not knowing what her father was! For he must be something, of course!

"You needn't hurry away," Madge said, still

warming towards this pretty little thing in the shabby dress. "I don't expect anyone else this afternoon. Let me see what you are like at the piano."

Maggie's eyes lit up. It was going to be a treat to her, that was evident, her getting a few minutes at the piano. Eagerly she lifted aside the market-bag which she had brought with her into the room, and which she had placed upon the music-stool. Too eagerly! For she let one handle of the bag go, and the contents flopped out on to the floor.

"Father's boots," she explained, as Madge helped to retrieve them from the carpet. "He has been having rubber soles put on, because he thinks they'll go a long time then."

Madge made no comment on this, although she took it all in as so much more evidence of the struggling existence which the girl and her father lived. Maggie twirled the piano-stool so as to raise it to suit her height, and then sat down.

"Yes, play anything," Madge smiled, as the girl's hands hovered hesitantly over the keys.

It would not be surprising, Madge felt, if she found herself listening to some tinkly-tinkly piece of the most rubbishy kind. And instead—

It was wonderful—marvellous!

Little Maggie began a piece of Beethoven. Beethoven! Madge herself knew the piece by heart, and was rather proud of being able to play it so. What a credit to this other girl then, whose tuition had been so haphazard, that she also could play it from memory! What a classic taste it revealed!

Maggie was a little shy, and she broke down once or twice. At last, too, she broke off altogether, with a nervous laugh.

"No, I—I can't remember any more," she owned, slipping to her feet. "It was silly of me to try, perhaps."

"Maggie, you are wonderful!" Madge assured her, laying a hand on the girl's shoulder. "Oh, how glad I am you came to me to-day! I shall simply revel in bringing you on—you've got the music in you!"

They talked music like enthusiasts both for a minute or so, then Maggie took up the bag of boots, to be off. An appointment had been made for the first lesson, and Madge also acquired Maggie's address. It was in this same shabby quarter of Barncombe—only just round the corner, in fact.

"Poor little soul!" Madge murmured to herself, as she stood at the street door, a few moments later, watching her shabby young friend hurrying away. "The lives some children have to lead! And she is so clever, too! No mother either; that's the saddest part of all!"

It was. How terribly sad, Madge would only realise to the full when she knew—as she was fated soon to know—what Maggie's father really was!

#### The Midnight Alarm.

MADGE got back to the Priory, after her eventful afternoon, to find the Fourth Form enjoying a twofold reason for excitement.

The hockey team had won its match, and so—"Hurrah!"

On top of this happy sensation, the girls had heard all about Madge's extraordinary enterprise. Cora had "told," as she might have been expected to do. And with what glee had that mischief-maker noticed how astounded, scandalised, all the girls were!



Between tea-time and prep., Madge certainly had it made pretty clear to her that she had "done for herself" in the eyes of the Form.

Some of her best friends came to her, looking utterly shocked at what they had been told.

Was it really true that she, Madge, intended to make pocket-money by giving music-lessons—really true that she would even accept "fees" from her own chums? And she was going to back out of hockey matches, was she—like she had to-day—so as to be free to grub for money!

Ready to let the Form go hang, just for the sake of turning one's talent into a money-making proposition!

Yes, it was all quite true, for all Madge had to say to the contrary. She said very little, in fact; but that little did not point to Cora's having giving a distorted version of the truth.

So the friends who came to question Madge mostly withdrew with a telling slam of the door behind them. Those who did not withdraw in disgust, did so in sorrow.

Paula was one of the latter. Polly Linton was another. Betty Barton was a third. If—ah, if

It rankled, though. Madge had always been of a very independent, self-willed nature, resenting the tendency of a great school like Morcove to make "all girls alike." So now, whether it was right or wrong of her to do so, she felt there was something very unfair in the Form's scandalised attitude.

Too bad of them to taunt her!

She had fallen asleep, and was dreaming of Maggie Shaw playing the Woodland Symphony in front of an enormous audience. The piece of music did not come to an end, for all of a sudden the audience seemed to stand up and make a tremendous demonstration. Everybody was shouting and yelling, and then—

And then Madge woke up, to find her room-mates out of their beds, and Polly, for one, hurriedly lighting a candle.

They were talking excitedly amongst themselves. Strange to say, a medley of excited talk was also coming from other bedrooms.

"Hallo! What's the matter then?" Madge exclaimed, sitting up.

? What did the match say when Betty Barton rushed across to light the spirit stove? ?

How does Polly Linton differ from a farm student?

When is musical Madge Minden like a mariner?

Can you guess the answers to these riddles?

They appear with any number of other riddles in the wonderful

## RIDDLE AND INDOOR GAME BOOK

TO BE GIVEN FREE

with Next Tuesday's Schoolgirls' Own.

Madge could have told them that she and her people were suddenly hard up, how they would have admired her resource and pluck in turning to! But there was nothing like that to account for her turning her charming accomplishments into money.

At last Madge was in the bedroom which she shared with Betty, Polly, Paula, and Tess. And though there was no merciless teasing or taunting from those girls, there was something almost as painful—an embarrassed silence!

After lights-out, no lying awake to chat away in the old chummy way. Very formally, Madge's chums said a simple "Good-night, Madge," and then they seemed to go to sleep at once.

It had been a disturbing evening for Madge. Now, however, she had ample opportunity for pondering her position—the daring thing she had done, and the consequence entailed.

Yes, she had lost caste amongst her friends; had done for herself in the eyes of all.

"But I am not going to let that bother me!" she decided, turning over to seek sleep.

"We don't know!" said Betty. "But it sounded like burglars!"

Only pausing to slip on dressing-gowns and slippers, the girls swarmed out into the corridor, to mingle with the inmates of other bedrooms as they, too, came hurrying out.

Half a dozen candles, held by as many shaky girls, lit up a scene of wild alarm. A moment, and Miss Redgrave appeared, candle in hand, to be followed by Miss Massingham.

"Hush, hush! Calm yourselves, girls! I think you should all go back to your rooms," entreated both mistresses; but little the words were heeded.

In another part of the great old house, the Fifth Form had roused up in the same excited way. The Fourth Form, setting off behind their two mistresses towards the stairs, met the other Form; and what a babel of whispered talk it was then!

Burglars, without a doubt! That was the general opinion.

Heart in mouth, and yet drawn on by a sort of thrilling curiosity, the girls crept after the mistresses down the stairs.

Pausing at every other step to listen, and hearing nothing, they stole, step by step, down the great staircase, round this landing and that, until the great entrance-hall of the old house was revealed to them in the candlelight.

Nothing!

No sign there of any burglars. But, sure enough, when the excited inmates of the temporary school were looking around in the downstairs rooms, they found ample proof that the house had been broken into.

A French window was standing wide open. And this particular room—one in which the business affairs of the school were being conducted—had been turned upside down.

A small safe had been opened and rifled. All the school's ready cash had gone, along with certain silver and gold medals that, for the time being, had been placed for safe custody there.

Some of the girls had a look at the French window by which the culprit had entered and quitted the place. The fastenings had been cleverly forced, as all could see. But it was Betty who pointed out how the wooden step had been splintered in a most curious manner.

"Queer!" commented Tess, amongst the crowd that stood around. "Why did he have to do that, I wonder?"

"I should say it was an accident," hazarded Betty. "He made a clumsy rush from the room, taking the 'swag' with him, and hucked his foot against the wooden step—"

"So violently that he splintered it!" put in Dolly Delane. "He was in a hurry, no doubt about that!"

Then came a word from the mistresses which the girls were almost dreading.

"Back to bed, all!"

So, seething with talk again, the girls trooped back upstairs, and, between the warm sheets again, they remained awake for a length of time that did not promise well for their being disposed to get up at the first ring of the bell next morning!

There were, in fact, a good many lie-abeds when the hour had come for rising.

If a few of the girls were out of bed at once, that was only because curiosity had conquered

weariness. They wanted to get dressed and down into the grounds, to have a look round for "clues"!

"Madge," screamed Cora from her warm bed, as she caught sight of that girl going by in the passage, "I won't have my eighteen penn'orth this morning. Too tired!"

And Cora, with a yah-ing yawn, turned over, grinning maliciously as she heard the peal of laughter that her day's first taunt had set up.

Frightfully keen were Betty and some of them this morning on playing at amateur detectives! As Fate willed it, however, it was to be Madge—Madge, merely taking a saunter round the grounds—who found a clue.

For, suddenly, in a by-path through a shrubbery, she saw before her on the mossy track the rubber sole of a man's boot.

She pounced and snatched it up, her heart pounding wildly. A glance at it—then a cautious look around—then she examined it more closely.

The piece of rubber was unworn. It had been torn away from the boot whilst still new—torn away by some accidental, slashing wrench.

In a flash, Madge remembered the splintered doorstep. Her mind pictured the whole thing happening. The burglar, put to sudden flight, dashing one foot against the step violently, thus splintering the wood and almost wrenching off his rubber sole; then his running on, with the rubber ready to drop off at any instant—flap, flap, flap, at every fugitive step.

So at last the rubber sole had worked off—and she had found it here. And it was one of the robber soles like Maggie Shaw's own father had had fastened to his boots!

Rubber soles—to deaden his footfall at night-time.

Madge looked at the piece of rubber again.

Could it be possible?

If so, poor—poor Maggie!

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

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