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# The Schoolgirl's Own

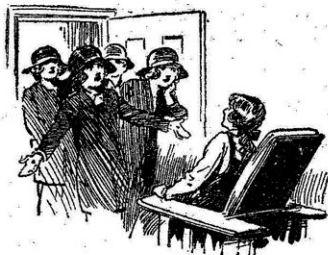


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**CORA'S "CHOIR"!** (An incident from the grand long complete story of the girls of Morecove School contained in this issue.)

A "Morcove" story appears every week, and there is not a school story you will enjoy more.

# A Schoolgirl's Treachery!



A magnificent new long complete story of the girls of Morcove School, which tells of the further thrilling experiences of Madge Minden, the Musician of the Fourth Form.

By **MARJORIE STANTON.**

## In Madcap Mood.

"**P**PAULA!"

"Yes, Polly deah?"

"Time for choir pracker!"

"Oh, bai Jove! Yes, wather!"

And Paula Creel started to leave out of the low armchair in which Polly Linton had found her reclining at ease.

"Well, hurry up!" laughed Polly, the madcap. "I will not detain you one moment," declared Paula. At the same time, she showed signs of relapsing in the chair. "I will fwankly admit, Polly deah—"

"Yes, but come along! Hustle! It's not like keeping a Form-mistress waiting. You will be keeping Madge Minden waiting, you know! Think of that!"

"Yes, wather! Howevah!" Paula was loling back once more. She continued with her amiable drawl:

"I will fwankly admit, Polly deah, I was enjoying a wather wewashing doze when you came in with wather more noise than cememony, bai Jove! I was dweaming dweams, Polly. I—"

"Oh, my patience!" Polly cast about her for a nice large cushion to hurl at the drawer. And she found one.

"If you—don't—get out—of that chair, Paula—"

"Polly deah, pway wefwain fwom thwowing things about," pleaded Paula, starting up with real alacrity. "It only results in my getting wumped hair. And you weally must wealise," she said, taking out a pocket mirror and comb, "I do like to look respectable when I go into class!"

"What were you dweaming about, at eleven o'clock in the morning, duffer?" Polly asked, at the same time nodding a "Hallo, Betty!" as the Form captain looked into the study.

"Ah!" said Paula, putting a dear little tress of hair into exact position. "Wemarkable thing, I was dweaming that the school choir won the gwand prize at the Festival on Wednesday, bai Jove!"

"Remarkable!" echoed Betty, lightly. "That dream ought easily to come true, Paula dear!"

"Yes, wather! Howevah!"

"It won't," chuckled Polly, "if you don't turn up for singing pracker before another minute is out! What a fraud you are, Paula!"

"A fwaud, Polly? Pway—"

"Getting let off a whole morning's work in class, with the rest of the choir, because the

Festival is so close now; and then going to sleep in your study, and— Oh, hurry up!"

"We really ought to," agreed Betty.

"Stick the locking-glass away!" Polly fairly roared at the finicky aristocrat of the Form. "You and your bothersome hair—there, look out!"

And whiz! came the hurled cushion at last, as Polly fell.

Paula yelped "Polly deah!" and dived aside, and the cushion only fell plop! upon the seat of another armchair. There was no shortage of armchairs in Paula Creel's study.

Some dust flew up, and Paula coughed. "Most distwessing!" she sighed. "Just when I want to keep my voice in twim! I feel a tickling in my thwroat, Polly, all thwrough you!"

Whereupon Polly lugged a paper bag from her dress pocket.

"Poor dear!" she said, with scathing sympathy. "Try a cough lozenge, Paula. Take two, dear; they'll do the trick!"

"Bai Jove, Polly, how good of you!" said Paula, eagerly popping two little bits of sweetmeat into her mouth. "There are times, Polly—there are times when I wealise that you—that you— Bai Jove!" she broke off with sudden breathlessness. "Polly—"

"Don't cry dear!" said Polly. "I know you love me; but you needn't cry about it!"

"I—weally, I am not cwyng on that account, Polly! I—gwacious, I can't help cwyng! Heah, help, I am losing my bweath!" Paula gasped, waving her slender arms about in distress. "I'm weeping oceans of tears, bai Jove, and I—hoo! I—hah!—gwacious—I can't wealise what's wong!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" went off Polly deliriously. "Oh, dear!"

"Hoo!" panted poor Paula, suddenly flopping into a chair. "Bai Jove! Bweathless! Fwostwate! Goals, I—pway get a doctor, quick! I feel dweadful!"

"It must be the sweets!" said Betty.

"It weally is the—hoo, hah!—the wretched sweets!" gasped Paula. "Polly said they would do the twick, and they—they've done it wight enough! They've killed me!"

Polly simply staggered about the study, shrieking with laughter.

"How fw-fwivolous you are!" Paula panted reproachfully. "If you knew how near I am to expwching on the spot, bai Jove! Betty—both of you—my gwacious!"

"You dear old duffer!" chuckled Polly. "What did you want to help yourself to menthol lozenges



for, instead of the cayenne ones?" Polly exploded, thus throwing light on the cause of Paula's sudden collapse. "Two of those menthol lozenges are enough to take one's breath away!"

"They—they are, dear! I can bear witness to that," gasped Paula. "Howevah, I—I will not wepwoach you, Polly dear. You meant well—yes, wather!"

It may have been Betty's opinion that her chum Polly had meant Paula to take the wrong sweets; but she held her peace. The three girls really ought to have got down to the music-room by now, and the merriment ended in Betty and Polly helping Paula out of the chair, and more or less helping her all the way downstairs.

In the spacious room which was doing duty as a music-room, some twenty scholars had already assembled. They, with Betty, Polly, and Paula, formed the choir which had been made up out of the Fourth and Fifth Forms, with a view to competing against other local choirs at the much-talked-of Musical Festival which was to take place in Barncombe town, on Wednesday next.

The room was not at all like the specially-constructed chamber which the girls had been accustomed to at Morcove School.

That fine range of buildings had been burnt out by a fire several weeks ago, and for the present the various Forms were quartered in different parts of the neighbourhood. Here, at The Priory—a fine old mansion—the Fourth and Fifth Forms were in residence, under their usual mistresses.

Nor was the music-instructress, who now came into the room to take the choir at practice, one whom the girls had been accustomed to in the past.

A stranger, indeed, would have stared in amazement to see—not a learned-looking music-teacher who had been through one of the colleges of music and who could put letters after her name, but—a mere schoolgirl!

Yes. She was a girl no older than the girls in the choir itself, who now came into the room. She was, in fact, one of them at all times except during choir practice. Madge Minden, of the Fourth Form—so she would have described herself to any inquiring stranger—simply.

But Betty and Co. would have had far more to say about her than that!

They would have been only too eager to explain how Madge was a most talented musician, and what a perfect instructress she made, filling the breach caused by the sudden unavoidable absence of the school's official teacher.

In a good-natured way, the choir made a bit of fun out of their being "under" Madge these days. But the fun always took place outside the music-room.

Inside it—at times like this, for instance—all was orderliness and serious attention to the lesson, for the choir was dead keen about the coming contest.

It viewed the competition in just the same way that it viewed hockey matches against other school teams; here was a chance for Morcove to do credit to itself, and the thing was to go in and win!

"All here? Good!" was Madge's delighted comment, as she scanned the assembled choir after the girls had taken their places. "Well, it is Monday, and Wednesday next is the day! I won't say any more!" she finished, with an engaging smile that enhanced the charm of her good looks.

Tap! went the tuning-fork upon Madge's desk, and then she gave them "Doh."

Every girl in the choir sang the note, and sang it as well as she could. But something was

wrong. They would have known it, even if Madge had not made a grimace as if she had tooth-ache!

"Is somebody here with a cold?" she said, preparing to sound the note again. "If so, she had better be off before she gives it to the others!"

"Yes, wather!" Paula could not help agreeing, in a very audible undertone.

"Doh-h-h-h!"

Again the choir sang the note, and again—ugh! What on earth was wrong?

"Doh-h-h-h!" sang the choir. But there it was again—one awful voice, putting out all the rest! A horrible, flat "Daw-w-w-w-w!"

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Paula, gazing around. "It's dweadful!"

"Awful! Who—what—?" Other girls were starting to exclaim, when Madge struck the tuning fork once again.

"Now! Doh-h-h-h!"

"Doh-h-h-h—ee-eee!" put in a screechy voice. "Eee-eee-ee! Ee-haw, eee-haw!"

It was a downright donkey's bray, at last, and in a moment the whole choir was in an uproar.

"Oh—"

"Bai Jove—"

"It's someone—"

Then came an abrupt ending to the outcry.

Before the eyes of all the choir, Madge had taken a lightning stride to the table. It was covered with a cloth that hung down all round. She pulled the cover aside, and there, under the table was a crouching girl, her grinning face all red with bottled-up laughter.

"Cora—Cora Grandways!" chorused the choir.

"Oh—"

"Come out of that, Cora! This instant!" panted Madge fiercely.

"Hee, haw!" brayed Cora, mockingly. "Hee, haw—hee, haw! Honk, honk, honk!" Ha, ha, ha!

"Donkeys" Indeed.

"CORA!"

"Hee, haw! Ha, ha, ha! Oh, dear—ha, ha, ha!" shrielled the girl who had played this trick upon the choir. "What a lark!"

But next moment her merriment was receiving a sudden check. Madge had her sense of humour, and she could take a laugh against herself as well as most of us can. But this—this was no joke for the choir, and she meant it to be no joke for Cora in the end!

"Come out of that!" she cried fiercely; and, without giving Cora time to obey, she seized hold of her and simply hauled her from under the table.

It was like Cora to lose her temper at once.

"Here, you leave me—"

"Stand up!" Madge was already shaking the girl on to her feet.

"You leave me alone!" flared out Cora, her vulgar protest showing how scant was the good nature at the bottom of the "joke." Madge, indeed, would not have turned as fierce as this had she found another girl under the table. But it was Cora.

Madge knew Cora. All the school knew her for a nasty, malicious creature, who seemed to delight in making mischief.

"I have a good mind to box your ears!" Madge said.

"You try!"

"Go on, Madge—do!" urged all the choir.

"Yes, wather!—Bai Jove—disgrawful—"

"Turn her out—turn her out!"

"Yah!" sneered Cora, then, frowning about to face the angry girls. "What do I care for you?"

"About as much as we care for you, I expect!" said Polly.

"Any old choir can sing as well as the lot of you!" snapped Cora.

"Any old donkey can bray like you!" retorted Polly, causing a burst of delighted laughter. "Go away and join a donkey choir—"

"Yes, wather!"

"That will do," said Madge, very quietly. "Cora, take yourself off this instant, or I will report you—yes, I will!"

"You'd love to, I know! Just to show off your authority!"

"Oh, drop that, Cora!" struck in Betty, from her place in the choir. "It's feeble. There's nothing of the tell-tale about Madge. If she reports you, it will jolly well be what you deserve!"

"Hear, hear!" from Polly, heartily.

"Dear me, don't we think a lot of ourselves!" sneered Cora. "With our wonderful music mistress! But I've had my fun, and so now I leave you to get on with the caterwauling! You certainly need to practise!"

"This," said Madge, as quietly as ever, "is all because I had to drop you out of the choir, because you have no voice. Cora, what an idiot you are to—"

"Nothing of the sort!" flared up the spitfire again. "Who wants to belong to your silly choir? I don't! I don't believe in learning under a mere kid of a teacher—a schoolgirl who goes in for giving money-grubbing music lessons to wretched little—"

"Clear out!" shouted some of the girls.

"Wretched little step-girls! Ah, that's rattled her!" Cora exulted, pointing a scornful finger at Madge, as she backed away to the door. "Eighteenpence an hour, and never mind where the kids come from!"

She reached the door and went out, slamming it violently—bang! And there, in the passage, were several girls whose grinning faces told how they had been in the know about Cora's little "joke," and had come along to hear the fun.

"You did it, then, Cora?" tittered Ella Elgood.

"He, he, he!"

"Yes, we heard you," chimed in Diana Forbes.

"It was great! I say, shall we all give one shout into the room before we go back to class? Break is nearly over, but there is still a moment!"

"Good wheeze!" approved Mabel Rivers.

"All together—eh?"

"I don't mind," said Cora. "But I tell you what, I've got a ripping notion for later on! Such a game with Madge, by and by!"

"That will keep," said Diana, proud of her own suggestion. "Shall we—now?"

"Yes, let's!"

And they did.

Waiting a few moments, until the choir was well started with the singing lesson, they suddenly flung wide the door and sent a most discordant din into the room.

"Daw-w-w! Hee, haw! Ha, ha, ha! Dough, raisins, meat, fat, suet, lard, tea, dough!"

And then they fled, after clapping shut the door again—fled round a corner, as if in fear of their lives!

All that happened, however, was the calm resumption of the music-lesson in the music-room, whilst the after-break bell tinkled its summons to the ordinary classes to return to work.

"Never mind," said Cora, giving her low, malicious laugh, "wait till by and by!"

And she and her kindred spirits certainly did get some more "fun" at Madge Minden's expense before the day was out!

#### Hard Times for Madge.

COMING into their own comfortable den, round about tea-time that afternoon, Betty and Polly were surprised not to find Paula Creel keeping an armchair warm for them.

Greater still was their amazement when they found this note from Paula, scribbled upon a half-sheet of paper:

"Have stayed in to get a nice tea ready for you in my study. I feel ashamed of the number of times you have had me to tea in your study. Don't be a moment later than four-thirty!"

"Well, wonders will never cease!" exclaimed Polly. "How she must love us, our dear old duffer of a Paula, to put herself about like this!"

"We have been going to have tea with Paula for ages," Betty mused, with a smile. "But something has always happened!"

"Yes. What has happened is that Paula has taken her seat in that chair, and sat up in the end to have tea at our table!" chuckled the madcap.

"Never mind! She means business this time—hooray! It's nice, going out to tea!"

"Let's give her five minutes' grace," suggested Betty. "Paula will have her work cut out, getting tea for us in her study, single-handed!"

So, with nice consideration for their hostess-to-be, they waited until four-forty-five by the clock. Then they went along to Paula's study.

"Well, Paula darling!" they both began exuberantly—and then stood aghast.

Tea was not on the table, as promised. The cloth had not even been laid. Peering across the room, Betty and Polly beheld Paula, loling in an easy chair.

"Paula!"



**PAULA AND HER GUESTS!** "Oh!" cried Polly Linton. "You keep on saying 'one moment,' and you still sit there, Paula! I suppose we shall have to get the tea ourselves!"

"Oh, bai Jove, is that you, geals? I was just going to drop woud to see you!" drawled Paula.

"Howevah, pway come in!"

"Thank you so much!" Polly said sarcastically. "So good of you to ask us to come right in! You had perhaps forgotten that you asked us to come in to tea?"

"Bai Jove! So I did, geals! Oh, pway excuse me!" Paula cried, without getting up, however. "I had quite forgotten, don't you know. We'll soon have tea, howevah—yes, wather! In one moment, geals!"

"You say in one moment, but you still sit there!" cried Polly, whilst Betty simply chuckled. "Oh, it's no use talking to you, Paula! We'll have to get tea for ourselves, of course!"

"Yes," laughed Betty, "and we might have known that would be it!"

"You shall not go to any twouble at all, geals!" Paula stoutly declared, trying to get out of her easy chair. "Howevah, you'll find the cloth in the cupboard, don't you know, and all the cwockey, too! Yes, wather!"

"Yes, wather!" mimicked Polly. "Burr! You're a beauty, you are!"

After which candid expression of her feelings, the madcap joined with Betty in getting tea as quickly as possible.

Paula directed operations from the armchair; for, as she said, she was "weally wather a duffer with the cwockey," whilst her chums were so accustomed to laying a study "feed."

"There you are!" Betty said at last, with a grin. "So all you've got to do is to pour out, Paula."

"Oh, don't let her tax herself," said Polly, gravely. "You know she is not strong!"

"No, geals, I am wather a fwall creature, I admit. Howevah," said Paula, languidly getting to the tea-table, "I think I can manage now!"

Just as Betty and Polly were going off into a real shout of laughter, the door was tapped and then thrown open, disclosing a remarkably pretty young lady, in out-of-doors things.

"May I—"

"Oh!" cried Betty and Polly joyfully, whilst Paula exclaimed: "Bai Jove! It's Lady Lundy's daughter!"

"Still remembered, am I?"

"Wemembered! Why, wather! My dear Lady Evelyn," beamed Paula, rising gracefully to make the visitor welcome, "how extremewly nice of you! Pway sit down; pway have a cup of tea; pway—er—wemove your hat for a few minutes, do!"

"But I shall have to fly, in no time!" said the stylish young lady, looking very happy at being with the girls. "You know why I slipped over in the car from Barncombe? About the Music Festival—"

"Ah, yes!"

"We are so glad the school is entering a choir for the singing contest. Thanks, dear!" Lady Evelyn chatted on, as she took her cup. "And then the prize for the best pianoforte player, open to all comers—"

"Yes, the school is in for that, too!" exclaimed Betty. "We have one girl who's awfully keen on beating all comers!"

"Madge Minden, of course?" guessed the visitor.

"Oddly enough, no," said Betty. "Madge—oh, she is quite out of the pianoforte contest. She has debarred herself by—guess what? Taking pupils for money!"

"Never!"

"Yes, wather! Howevah—"

"Madge wants a jolly good talking to," exclaimed Polly. "We've tried, and it's no use, so you should have a go, please, Lady Evelyn! She came back from a week-end at Exeter, with a sudden crazy idea about teaching music for money!"

"Gracious! But, have her people lost a lot of money, then?" Lady Evelyn asked, ready to display keen sympathy. She was very fond of Madge.

"Oh, no! It's just a—silly sort of stunt!" was Polly's slangy answer. "And it's done her a world of harm. She has taken on at least one pupil outside the school—a poor girl!"

"Yes, wather—frightfully poor! In fact, dear Lady Evelyn, the geal is a—ah—er— To be pweicise, she is a stepgeal," Paula said.

Lady Evelyn laughed, setting down her cup.

"How lovely! How deliciously democratic!"

"Yes, wather!"

"Too democratic for some of the girls—not us, but the Cora set!" grumbled Polly. "They are leading Madge an awful life, just because of her step-girl pupil."

"I'm going to see Madge, right away!" the visitor said, jumping up. "I shall look back, of course!"

"Do!" they begged. "Four doors along you'll find Madge's study!"

With all the charming intimacy which was one of the things the girls liked her for, Lady Evelyn said "Ta-ta for the present!" and hurried away, and in a few moments she was whisking in upon Madge.

That girl, all alone in her study, was looking pale and worried, and Lady Evelyn thought it was the best thing to go straight to the point.

"Madge dear, how are you? Now don't let me disturb you; but I—I'm sorry to see you looking so humpy! It's all because of Cora Grandways and Company, eh, dear?"

Madge flushed then, only to go paler than ever in the next moment.

"No," she said huskily. "It is not that at all, Lady Evelyn. I—oh, I can't explain! I daren't even tell Betty and Polly and other chums what a muddle I'm in!"

"Madge!" It was a dismayed cry from Lady Evelyn, as she saw the girl drop into a chair and take her head between her hands. A little more, Lady Evelyn felt, and the schoolgirl would be bursting into tears!

And it was just at this painful moment that Cora and Co. started to get their latest bit of fun out of the harassed girl.

Even whilst Lady Evelyn was standing close to Madge, resting a compassionate hand upon the girl's shoulder, Cora and her cronies were silently assembling outside that study door.

A few of the girls were clapping hands across their mouths to keep back their laughter. Cora, for her part, was grinning up to her ears as she stood ready to wave a conductor's baton with her outstretched right hand.

"Now!" she whispered gleefully. "When I say go, make all the row you can! One—two—three—GO!"

And they went.

Away went their voices, at full pitch, as discordantly as possible. For the next few moments there was the most dreadful caterwauling outside Madge's closed door. Then Cora rapped for silence.

"Be-yootiful!" she said out loud. "I'm sure you will win the contest, girls! And no wonder,

when you have the professional services of a wonderful schoolgirl-teacher like myself—hem! Now we will do that be-yootiful little song called 'Only a Step-girl!'

The mock "choir" was almost collapsing with laughter.

"Stop it!" pleaded giggling Diana Forbes. "How can I sing if you others make me laugh? He, he, he!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"  
 "One, two—daw-w-w-w!" sang Cora, wagging the baton. "Hem! hem! Get it right, girls! Doooo-o-o-o! That's be-yootiful!"

At this instant, doors all along the passage began to open. Madge's was one, and Madge stood revealed, her eyes aflash.

"Go!" Cora quickly gave the word. "All together!"

And then, with their grinning leader to beat time, and all in as much discord as ever, they began howling and yelling these words:

"Oh, I'm only a pore little step-girl,

A-cleaning the steps all day!

I'd like to have lessings in moosic,

But I ain't got no money to pay!"

"Bravo, bravo!" Cora applauded her "choir." "One more verse, and then we'll go round with the hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

But the next verse never came!  
 Out of Cora's hand the baton was whipped by Madge. It flashed high above Madge's head, as if she meant to bring the pasteboard stick sharply across Cora's shoulders—slash!

"You do!" hissed Cora, cringing in fear of such a blow.

"I will, if you are not gone, the whole pack of you, in a moment!" Madge cried passionately. "You hateful snobs!"

"Ha, ha, ha! That's rattled her!" two or three of the tormentors exulted, at the same time backing to a safe distance. "Once again!"

"Oh, I'm only a pore little step-gal,

A-cleaning the steps all day!

I'd like to have lessings at moosic,

But——"

"Oh, look out!" yelled Cora, as she beheld half a dozen of Madge's chums making a rush at the "choir."

"Now, then! Now, what about it?" was Polly the madcap's cry, as she launched herself amongst the scattering tormentors, along with Betty, Paula, Tess Trelawney, and other spirited girls.

"Stop it! Stop it!" screeched Cora, as she was sent banging against the passage wall. "Oh—ooo! Polly, be quiet! Betty, leave off!"

"Ow, yes, leave off!" the rest of the choir began to howl, thrown into utter confusion.

"Aha! Singing a different tune now, aren't you?" Betty cried grimly. "We'll teach you to——"

"Stop it, you wretches!"  
 "Go on, you girls!" Lady Evelyn encouraged Betty and Co. gleefully, appearing at the door of Madge's den. "How lovely! Oh, shame, Cora—kicking! Shame!"

Except for Cora's lashing out with her feet, as she sat upon the floor with Polly almost on top of her, it was a most comical mix-up that prevailed for the next minute or so.

Such a souffling and fluttering there was, ending at last in the utter rout of the Grandways "choir," with Betty and Co. in full pursuit!

Slam—bang! went one or two study doors in the pursuers' faces; and then Betty and Co. came

drifting back to where Lady Evelyn had been enjoying the whole diverting scrimmage.

That tactful young lady, noticing how pale and agitated Madge was—as if stricken with humiliation at the way she was being ridiculed—thought it kindest to say a breezy "Ta-ta!" without further delay. Nor did Madge look anything else but relieved over the girl's hasty departure. As soon as the schoolgirl was alone, she turned the key in the lock, and then sat down to think.

With a hard sigh, she thumped one elbow on the table, and rested her cheek against a clenched hand, whilst her brows came together in a heavy frown.

At that moment she was the very picture of utter desperation; a girl pondering, alone, some awful trouble she dared confide to no one.

Right or wrong—which had she been in her actions during the past few weeks?

That was Madge Minden's constant thought, at present—the ugly question which was keeping her awake at nights. And when a girl is troubled with a question like that, what wonder if she feels miserable, distraught?

To have followed a certain course of action impulsively, and then to be faced with the uneasy doubt: was it a right thing to have done, after all? Enough to set one's nerves on edge!

There she sat, full of the gravest misgivings, and suddenly her stress of mind caused her to say with intense sadness:

"Poor Maggie—oh, poor Maggie! Who would not have done as I did, out of pity for that girl?"

There came a sudden rap at the study door, and Madge burst out irritably:

"Yes, what is it?"  
 "Have you forgotten, Madge?" called the voice of Audrey Blain. "I was to have a music-lesson at five o'clock!"

Madge Minden sighed again, and got up from her chair.

"All right," she answered gently. "I'm coming, Audrey!"

#### Maggie's Father is Afraid.

**R**OUND about that hour when Audrey Blain was practising her pianoforte recital for the coming Festival contest, another girl was doing just the same thing in a house not many miles away.

A very different sort of house from The Priory—and a very different sort of girl from wealthy Audrey Blain!

Here, at the lonely house on the moors, where poor Maggie Shaw and her father were acting as caretakers, the motherless child—for she was but a child still—had sat down to play through her Festival piece for the twentieth time to-day.

Ah, and what it would mean to little Maggie, if she did manage to pull off the wonderful prize; the diploma that meant so much to one's future career, the Lady Lundy gold medal, and the twenty pounds in hard cash!

No going to the contest, as Audrey for one was going, with an idea of covering oneself with glory and being made a lot of by all the grand patrons of the Festival. Nothing like that about Maggie!

What did it really matter to Audrey Blain whether she got a diploma, and all the rest, or not? Her heart was not in the music. She would never be called upon to carve out a career for herself.

But this motherless child—it meant, oh, so much to her, this chance that had come her way, largely thanks to the great-hearted schoolgirl who had befriended her.





**A WELCOME VISITOR!** "Hallo!" cried the girls joyfully. "Lady Evelyn Lundy! Oh, do come in and join us at tea!"

But for Madge Minden's helpful guidance—all given free—little Maggie would never have had the temerity to enter for the contest. But Madge had encouraged her, given her the most valuable tuition, and had declared that she, Maggie, stood as good a chance of winning the prize as any girl that Madge knew of.

This large, low-ceilinged drawing-room at the lonely house, lit only by a penny candle, was bitterly cold. Now that Maggie had got so chilled that she could hardly play any more, she got up from the piano, closing the shiny wooden cover over the ivory keys with a very careful hand.

Taking the music from the stand, she shuffled it together and laid it aside tidily. Then she went with the candle out to the big kitchen—the one room where she and her father had a fire, and where they partook of the frugal meals that little Maggie's busy hands so cleverly contrived.

He was there at the fireside, pipe in mouth; not a very attractive father for such a girl to have, one would say. He was shabby and unshaven, and his looks were of the sullen kind.

"Finished, have you?" he threw out, with less amiability than the girl deserved.

"For this evening, yes, father dear."

"Huh!" That was his only comment for the moment. But after he tapped out his pipe on the hob:

"I s'pose you think you're going to win that there prize, eh? Is that the notion that that schoolgirl has been stuffing into your noodle?"

Maggie was starting to lay the cloth for supper, for he had glanced at the table as a sign that he could do with something to eat. She could not help pausing for a moment, however.

"Oh, father dear, you would like me to win the prize, wouldn't you? Think what it means—"

"Ay, twenty pounds isn't to be sneezed at, with me—unable to get work," he said huffily. "But it all seems to me sheer nonsense, you a-thinking you can beat others as'll be at the contest. You,

that was only larned to play at the council-school—"

"They taught me very well there; Madge Minden said I must have had a very good grounding," the girl said gently. "And, just lately, father darling, she has been giving me special lessons. She says—"

"Ay, I can quite believe she has a lot to say—stuffing you up, I call it! However, Meg, if you think you can do a bit o' good for yourself, go in and do it. As for me—"

"Ah, father, you mustn't get down!" the girl said, coming round the table to rest a hand upon his broad shoulders. "I know you do try and try to get work, without success; but we have had one bit of good fortune lately, haven't we?"

"Getting the job o' looking after this here house?" he returned, as sullen as ever. "Yes, it's not so bad; it suits me—I don't say it don't. Only it won't last. You never know—"

He paused, looking suddenly uneasy.

"I never know what's going to happen," he muttered, more to himself than to the girl. And in the next moment he stood up, and drifted out of the kitchen, as if to avoid talk.

Making his way to the top of the house, he began to act in a strange, suspicious manner.

As if in fear of being spied upon by his own daughter, he paused at the head of the stairs and listened. Then, taking a key from his pocket, he softly stepped round to a certain attic-door and unlocked it.

His hand fumbled for a box of matches, and next moment he had struck a light and was holding it above his unkempt head, to peer around.

The attic was in a strange condition. All over the bare floor were little mounds of, apparently, old lumber, although each pile of stuff was so sheeted over that it was impossible to guess what lay underneath.

"Ay, the stuff I've got—if only I could get rid of it!" the man muttered to himself. "I'll have to find someone, before long, who'll take it off my hands without asking questions! It seems one thing to lay hold of the stuff, another thing to turn it into cash!"

The match burned down, and he voiced an angry snort as he dropped it from his scorched fingers and trod upon the spark. He did not strike another light, but backed out of the room and locked the door after him.

"One thing, no one has a suspicion," he consoled himself darkly, "unless it's that schoolgirl! I don't like the look of her butting in upon us, just to teach young Meg the piano! There's gals as fond as boys or men are at playing detective—especially at that there school! An' I can't forget that her taking an interest in Meg all began round about the time I did that job at the school!"

Loitering in thought on the dark landing, he scowled with greater uneasiness.

Apart from his uneasiness about Madge Minden, he always felt a thrill of fear when he thought of that "job" at the school. It was one which had nearly proved a disaster.

Where would he have been, this evening, if the police or anybody else had found the clue which he had unluckily left behind him on the night he broke into the school and looted one room?

He would have been in the town gaol, awaiting trial at the sessions! A housebreaker, caught at last, with a whole series of burglaries in the neighbourhood to be answered for in the dock!

"Ay, if I were sure the girl was only coming to see Meg to find out more about me," he reflected grimly, "I'd soon know what to do! One

thing," he again said consolingly to himself, "it's a lonely place, out here on the moors. I—I must keep my eye upon that girl!"

Strangely enough, he saw her next day—not at the house on the moors, but in Barcombe town.

He was loafing through the narrow back streets, in the poor quarter of the town where he had his own little home that Maggie, in the usual course, kept so spic-and-span, when he saw Madge Minden ride by on her cycle.

She did not see him. The day was windy, and she was riding with her head bent low to the gust. That she should be in this poor part of the town gave him fresh cause for alarm. He instantly wondered if she were going to call at his house on some artful pretext, but really to find out if it were a burglar's lair. She might have asked Maggie to meet her there, and—

No; there was nothing like that, he was able to tell himself with a gasp of relief almost immediately. She had ridden past the end of his street instead of turning into it. He quickened his pace, however, to try and see what her errand was, and so he saw her alight outside a quaint little house in Parish Place.

"Huh, I know who lives there; the deaf old party what's a musician herself, but can't give lessons no more," he said to himself. "All the same—"

All the same, the lurking fear remained.

No getting rid of that uneasy suspicion about that schoolgirl! He was a man so base himself, he could not credit anybody with generous instincts. He could not believe that Madge was acting out of pure friendship towards Maggie.

At this very moment Madge was with old Miss Ainley in the latter's dingy little home.

"And so you are going to conduct the school choir at the Festival to-morrow?" Miss Ainley was saying, keeping her admiring eyes upon the handsome, intelligent-looking schoolgirl. "What a feather in your cap, my dear!"

"It may be; but I shall be glad when it is all over, anyhow," Madge owned with a mirthless laugh. "I came to ask—you will be there, of course?"

"Oh, yes, yes, indeed!" was the earnest answer. "How could I remain away, my dear, when I know that my own poor little symphony is to be played by that pupil of yours? That piece I composed so many, many years ago! Ah, how strange life is, my dear!"

"Strange, and very sad, sometimes," Madge exclaimed, sighing. "To think that you will be unable to hear the piece, when little Maggie is playing it! But at least you will hear the applause; for I am sure that will be loud enough to wake the dead!" she added with a brighter expression.

"Applause—for my poor composition, after all the years it has been laid aside, rejected by publishers, cared for by no one except the poor foolish soul who once thought she would be famous!" said Miss Ainley. "If there is applause, it will be for little Maggie—and Maggie is welcome to it, yes. That child, how I hope and pray it will mean the beginning of great things for her!"

"I think, I honestly believe it will," said Madge. "But you must not be so pessimistic about that 'Woodland Symphony' of yours! It will make a hit at last, I am certain. And then you will become famous in a day!"

"Oh, my dear, how you talk! But it is sweet of you!" the poor soul said, with eyes a-shine. She held out her hand.

"I see you are in a hurry to be off, my dear,

and so—good-bye until to-morrow at the Festival! Good-bye, and thank you; bless you, Madge! The happiness you have brought into the tired heart of a lonely old woman—into the life of that poor little step-girl with her out-of-work father! Ah—"

"Nonsense!" Madge exclaimed; but she could not help feeling comforted. If she had been making ghastly mistakes, she had at least done some bit of good at the same time.

"It is folk like you, my dear, who make the world go round," Miss Ainley said very tenderly. "Good-bye once again, until to-morrow at the Festival!"

"I shall be there early, and will look out for you," was Madge's last word at the doorstep. "Ta-ta!"

And she rode away.

"There early!" had she said?

She little knew the danger that was closing in around her!

She little knew how terrible was the catastrophe that threatened to prevent both her and little Maggie from being at to-morrow's Festival!

#### Audrey Sees the Way.

ALL the members of the school choir were being let off classwork this Tuesday afternoon. And Audrey was one of them.

She had spent a full hour at the piano, trying to imagine that she was even then at the Festival, playing her chosen piece in front of all the keen judges and an enormous audience besides.



**GRATITUDE!** "It is girls like you, my dear, who make the world go round," Miss Ainley said tenderly, grasping Madge's hand.



As her deft fingers came to rest upon the ivory keys, after the last crashing chords, she had seemed to hear the thunder of applause that she felt certain would fall to her to-morrow.

But—was she going to be acclaimed the proud winner of the prize?

Not if Maggie Shaw was there!

That was the bitter fact that Audrey had to face; the maddening thought that had possessed her brain for several days now.

Madge had frankly warned her that little Maggie's playing would eclipse hers, Audrey's. And Audrey, having given at least one secret hearing to Maggie's playing, at the house on the moor, could not feel anything but jealousy and despair.

Maggie would prove the winner, unless—unless she was kept away from the contest! But how to prevent the girl from being present? That was the question over which Audrey had racked her brain, hour after hour, and she was taking the first step even now. One could not be certain, but it might achieve her purpose—yes, it might!

Alone in her study, seated at her table, she was writing these lines upon a sheet of notepaper, in a disguised hand:

"To Mr. Shaw,

"Take warning! There is somebody who knows what you are, and all about your burglary at the school!

"Unless you want to see yourself betrayed to the police, get away at once, and take your daughter with you!

"An hour's delay may mean all the difference between freedom and imprisonment!"

She did not sign the warning message. It went against the grain with her to put some such words as "A Friend," at the end of the note. She had not a spark of friendly pity for Maggie, let alone Maggie's rascally father.

Slipping the note into an envelope, she gummed it up, and then glanced at her wrist-watch.

The afternoon was well advanced; but there was time—if she "flew"—time for her to get out to the house on the moors and back again, before dark.

On went her hat and out-door coat, and five minutes later she was pedalling along the open road as fast as she could go.

Then, presently, she slowed down and sprang from the saddle. She was in sight of the lonely house, although it was still some distance away, sheltered amongst some stunted trees well off the road.

Audrey hid her cycle amongst some of the prickly bushes, and then prowled forward, making for the back entrance to the grounds.

In the eerie silence she suddenly picked up a faint sound that made her smile queerly to herself. The music of a piano! So, then, Maggie was at the piano at this very moment, practising hard for to-morrow's thrilling contest!

"She might just as well save herself the trouble," was Audrey's cynical thought.

Then she caught sight of another girl's bicycle, propped against a tree-stem in the neglected garden. It was Madge's machine. Audrey recognised it in a flash.

"So she is here again, this afternoon, is she? Doing all she possibly can to help Maggie win the prize! I wonder how Madge will feel when her wonderful step-girl prodigy fails to turn up to-morrow? Serve her right, for wanting to see an outsider win the prize!"

Stealthily she entered the rank garden and prowled amongst the overgrown shrubs to the back door. There she found a letter slot, and she slipped her note into it, then darted away.

Done!

Yes, the thing was done. The missive was addressed on the outside to "Mr. Shaw," and it was hardly likely that little Maggie would open it. And what matter even if she did?

She would learn with horror that her own father was a wrongdoer, and for his sake she would be anxious for him to flee the neighbourhood at once, taking her with him.

Audrey found her bicycle where she had left it. Vaulting into the saddle, she rode swiftly homewards, smiling all the way with secret satisfaction.

#### What Will Happen Now?

IN the darkening drawing-room of the house on the moor, Madge Minden was taking her leave of little Maggie, after a half-hour at the piano.

"Fancy your riding on out here to see me, after your journey into the town!" Maggie was exclaiming, as she shut up the piano as carefully as ever. "It was good of you!"

"Oh, on the bike, the distance was nothing, dear!" Madge said lightly. "But I shall have to hurry, and no mistake, if I am to get in before dark!"

"I suppose you must," murmured Maggie, her large eyes resting adoringly upon this schoolgirl who had been such a friend indeed to her. "I wish you could have stopped and let me give you a cup of tea—"

"Oh!"

"You see, father being out makes all the difference—" Maggie said, with a bit of a gulp. "I—I know you don't like meeting father."

"Maggie, dear, you—you mustn't think that I—"

It was Madge's turn to falter. She even broke down altogether, unable to pretend that the father was a man whom she could take to. How could she, when she suspected him of being a burglar?

"I'm not surprised," came very quietly from the poor child. "I have often noticed that people don't take to him, and perhaps—perhaps that's why he doesn't get any regular work. But he really is the best of fathers. I—I'd be ashamed not to—love him, just because he is down on his luck."

"Ah, Maggie darling, when you talk like that!" Madge exclaimed, feeling her eyes grow moist. "What a brick you are, dear! And how I hope and pray that some day you will be—"

"Hark, though! There is father coming in now!" Maggie interjected, rearing her head to listen. "Yes, that's dad! But it doesn't matter, does it?"

"No, dear," Madge had to assent, whilst her heart beat fast.

For the hundredth time she went over the arguments, for and against, of denouncing him to the police. He was a danger to society—true! But, then, he was Maggie's father! Poor little Maggie—the shock! She might never get over it. No, she must hold her tongue.

"I—I suppose I had better go out the back way, as usual?" muttered Madge.

She said it, hoping that Maggie for once would suggest unbolting the front door. The father was at the back door, and to go out that way meant coming face to face with him in the kitchen.

"I don't know, I'm sure," Maggie hesitated. "As caretakers, we are only supposed to use the

back entrance. You—you won't mind just meeting dad for—a moment?"

"Why, of course not, dear!" Madge forced herself to say lightly.

So they went together round to the domestic regions, and there was Maggie's father, standing full in the doorway whilst he started to open a note that the child was surprised to see him handling.

"A letter, dad?"

"Ay! I dunno what about. 'Arternoon, miss!" he nodded sullenly at Madge, whilst he thought to himself suspiciously: "You here agen, are you!"

"Oh, father darling, if it should be about some work for you?" little Maggie exclaimed excitedly.

"Ay, but—but it ain't," he suddenly said huskily, still staring at the note, which shaking hands held before his dilating eyes. "No, it ain't about work, Maggie!"

"Then what—"

"Eh? Never you mind, my girl!" He suddenly crumpled up the note and thrust it into a jacket pocket.

Then he stood looking across at Madge, his burly figure still barring her way to the back door.

"Mr. Shaw," she faltered, reading some ugly menace in his shifty eyes, "I ran out on my machine to see Maggie for the last time before the contest. You know—"

"Ay, I know! I know more nor you think,

then, grimly. "She may have to make her bed along of you, Meg."

"What?" gasped the child, in wild amazement, whilst Madge suddenly burst out indignantly:

"How dare you, Mr. Shaw! Please let me go this instant—I insist! You have no right—"

"No right! Ay, mebbe not!" he cut in roughly, at the same time making a sudden grab and holding her by one wrist. "When it comes to that, howsever, what right had you to spy on me—track me down—"

"Mr. Shaw—"

"You darsn't deny it!" he said with rising fury. "You ha' only been making friends with my darter there to worm out all about me! And you've found out too much—I know it! You're a-going to gimme away to the police, now that you've got all the evidence! You—you-artful minx!"

Little Maggie had burst into tears.

"Dad—dad, don't! Oh, don't say such things! I—I've never seen you like this before! Madge, I think he's ill—mad—"

"Nay, my gal; not mad, leasterways, in the way you mean," he said fiercely. "Only mad to think as a double-faced, foxy schoolgirl should stoop to a game like this! But you're caught, young lady! It's you, not me, that's caught, arter all!"

"Let go my hand this instant!" Madge gasped at him, whilst she felt ready to swoon with horror of this awful plight she was in. "You are alto-

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young lady," he cut her short, taking a slow step towards her.

Madge shrank back slightly, and Maggie went close to her, clasping her about one arm.

"Father!" the child jerked out in great distress. "Oh, don't look like that at both of us! What have we done, father dear? This kind friend of mine—what offence can she have given you?"

Without answering, he reached behind him and drove the kitchen door shut.

### No one to Save Them.

MADGE'S heart was pounding faster than ever. She had guessed the meaning of his truculent looks. He knew that she suspected him.

What, then, was she to do?

What else could she do but get away before his threatening mood grew fiercer.

"Good-bye, Maggie!" she managed to say composedly, turning upon the all-unknowing child. "I shall see you to-morrow, then! Good-afternoon, Mr. Shaw, I must be going! I—"

"Wait a bit," he said thickly, waving her back as she would have gone past him to the back door. "Don't you be in such a hurry, my gal!"

"But, father," ventured little Maggie, "she must hurry, to get back to the school before dark!"

"She don't know for certain that she's going to get back to the school at all to-night," he said

gether wrong! Far from wanting to betray you to the police, I have shielded you!"

"So you say! But the warning I've just had says summat else," he retorted. "Meg, stop that snivelling!"

"You've upset your poor child," Madge said tearfully, as she cast a glance at little Maggie. "This is the first hint she has ever had that you are—what you are! Oh, why did you say a word? Why did you ever mistrust me?"

"I've a-been mistrusting you, I tell you now, from the very start," he owned huskily. "And I were right to do so seemingly! That note I've had—"

"I can't help that!" You must not—you shan't detain me here!"

At this instant poor Maggie simply threw herself between her father and the schoolgirl, crying out wildly to him to let her go. He still held Madge by the wrist, but the child's desperate intervention confused him, and suddenly the schoolgirl tore the imprisoned arm free.

In the self-same instant she flashed about and darted away to the hall, hoping to reach the front door and escape that way.

Then she heard him shouting furiously at little Maggie, who was trying to hinder his pursuit, and for the life of her Madge could not run on.

The poor child—he was going to vent his rage upon her, and that was too terrible.

"Oh, run—run!" the brave little soul cried

out in an agonised voice, as she realised how Madge was hesitating. "Never mind me, Madge—run, run! Get away, quick! Father—don't, father darling—oh!"

"Out of my path, Meg!" he roared. "You little fool, d'you know what it means if she does get away? Prison for me!"

"No, no! Oh, you don't know her—how good and kind she is!" sobbed the poor child.

But he cried fiercely: "Bah, don't talk to me!" and put her roughly aside.

Then Madge resumed her frantic rush through the house to the front hall. But even as she did so she remembered that the front door was locked and bolted.

How could she get away, when he was only a few paces behind her?

She did not get away. Even as she reached the locked door, he overtook her, and caught her once again. She struggled fiercely, madly, and the very shock of the struggle made all her senses reel.

Another moment, and she was falling crash to the floor in a dead faint.

Instantly he stood away from her, calling to his daughter:

"Meg! Come here, gal!"

All of a tremble, and with the tears coursing down her ashen cheeks, the terrified child came hurrying forward from the kitchen, and he pointed to the prone girl.

"Now, don't you go a-fainting, too!" he growled roughly. "Pull yourself together, Meg! Answer me! Do anybody at the school know she came to this house to-day?"

"N-n-no, father. At least—oh, father darling—"

"Ay," he said with a rough laugh, "you'd like to pretend that she may be traced, is that it? But you've given yourself away, my gal! No-one has ever known about her coming here!"

He pointed down at Madge again.

"See here, then! I'm a-going to lock her up, and you along of her—"

"Oh, father—no!" the poor child almost shrieked. "Why will you be so cruel, so wicked?"

"It ain't that I want to be, but I must," he answered desperately. "I've been warned to get away, and I'm a-going! Ay, this very hour, I am! You—you can't come with me—"

She was weeping again, half crazy with fright and horror.

"I don't understand, father dear! What have you ever done that you should have to run away? This girl—so kind and good to me—"

"She could give me away to the police if she went back—and so she would," he declared fiercely. "Anyhow, I'm taking no chances! She's here, and here she stays until I'm at the other end of the kingdom! And you'll stay along of her—you must!"

He stamped off back to the kitchen, and in the dark hall poor Maggie still knelt beside her senseless friend, raining tears upon the limp hand that she clasped in her own.

"And you were so good to me—so good and kind!" the child whimpered. "Oh, what shall I do; how can I save you, Madge?"

#### From Gay to Grave!

It was that time of the evening when the girls at The Priory usually settled down to "prep."

Betty Barton was going along to her study, when she chanced to see Cora Grandways and Diana Forbes come out of Madge Minden's den.

"Is Madge back, then?" Betty asked.

"No."

"Then what are you doing in her room?"

"What's that to do with you?" snapped Cora.

Betty felt it was quite her business to find out. She was just about sick of seeing Madge being japed and derided in the most ill-natured manner by Cora and her cronies. Had they been devising some fresh plan for Madge's humiliation during her absence?

It looked rather like it; and Betty opened the door and peeped into the room.

Then she gave a gasp of indignation. She had been right in her suspicion. Pinned to one of the study walls was an enormous cartoon, done in white chalk on brown paper.

It showed a young girl in rags and tatters, with a turn-up nose and tousled hair, thumping away at a piano, whilst another girl—this was a caricature of Madge, and a most insulting one, too—stood by the piano, waving a conductor's baton.

Betty never paused to read the derisive wording at the foot of the cartoon. She simply tore down the great sheet and crumpled it up.

Then she stamped on it. Further, to make quite sure that the thing would never meet Madge's eye, she took the destroyed sheet along with her to her own den, and hastily stuffed it away in an odd drawer.

Polly was there, but she observed none of Betty's silent anger, for Polly had got the gramophone going.

"That's the stuff to give 'em, and bother sympathy things!" chuckled Polly, as she took "Swanee River" off the instrument and put on a fox-trot. "And now for a bit of a dance, Betty dear, because it's the night before the Festival, and we are all rightfully bucked—"

"Your language, Polly!"

"Eh, what?" chuckled the madcap, winding away at the handle. "Yes, come in, Paula!"

"Bai Jove—the gwamophone, what? How wipping, geals!"

"But if you think you are going to sit down, you're mistaken!" said Polly grimly, starting the machine. "No you don't, Paula! It's a fox-trot—"

"Polly dear—"

"Our dance, I think, what, what?" Polly cried, putting on the air of a young Johnny. She pretended to fix a monocle in her eye. "Haw, haw, how jolly!"

"I quite agwee," said Paula, lolling back in the armchair. "Howevah, I am just welising that it is time to begin pewp, bai Jove!"

"Prep! Sit on her, someone!" said Polly, winding up the gramophone again. "We'll have another dance round, anyhow, before we settle down!"

"So Madge isn't here with you, Betty!" Tess remarked to the Form captain. "Not back yet, it seems. She's late! But perhaps she had special permission, and is coming back with one of the mistresses. She—"

Bang! went some bit of mechanism in the gramophone at this instant, and Polly shouted:

"Oh, there! Bust again, Betty!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Malheur—bad luck!" said Trixie.

"Wather a relief, I imagine," murmured Paula, who looked like going to sleep in her favourite chair. "Howevah—"

With a swoop, Polly was upon her.

"I'll give you 'relief'!" chuckled the madcap, lugging Paula out of the enticing chair. "Cheek, to be glad because the gramophone is busted up again!"

"Haow downright widiculous you weally are—"



oh, I didn't mean to be offensive," Paula said, dodging away from the madcap. "Geals, if you are off, I'm coming too, bai Jove!"

They scampered away to see if Madge had returned, but there was no finding her anywhere about the place. What the girls did find, instead, was that Miss Massingham and the other mistresses were very uneasy over the girl's protracted absence.

The girl had been granted ready permission to go into Barncombe in the afternoon, and it would not have been surprising if she had got back only just before nightfall; for there had been many little things for her to see to in the town, in connection with the Festival.

But here was dark night lying upon the lonely countryside that lay around The Priory, and she was not back even now!

What did it mean?

It seemed hardly credible that she could have met with a cycling accident without being found; for there was no part of the road between the

Betty, Polly, and Tess were the last girls to return from the search, round about half-past nine.

"It's no use, Paula!" Betty declared tragically. "We can't go to the Festival! Almost time to start for it—and Madge is still missing!"

They stood talking about it all for a few minutes in subdued tones, and then Betty and Polly drifted away. In the corridor, they came upon Audrey Blain, who, they knew, had gone off alone during the early morning search.

"Which way did you take?" Betty asked.

"Oh, I was on my bike, and I—I covered a good bit of ground," she answered vaguely.

She had been out to the house on the moor; but she was not going to tell them that!

She knew that Madge and little Maggie were both helpless prisoners there, whilst the child's father had flown from the district during the night. But not a word did Audrey mean to say about this.

Time enough for her to discover Madge and her fellow-captive after the Festival! That was Audrey's opinion.



**THE CAUSE OF THE DISCORD!** Madge pulled up the table-cloth. There crouched Cora Grandways, whose tuneless voice had spoiled the choir's opening effort.

Priory and the town that remained absolutely deserted for hours at a stretch.

No. The theory that was formed, and which gained weight with everybody, girls and mistresses alike, was that the girl had had a sudden lapse of memory, and was simply wandering about at a complete loss.

It was realised how hard she had been taxing herself lately, and how she had shown signs of strain. All this induced her anxious friends to fear that something had "gone snap." But, in that case, it was certain that she would be found at last, wandering around in a vacant way, and would only need to be brought home and given every care to be made quite all right again.

Well before the dawn, Betty and Co. were out of their beds, dressing quickly. As the first streaks of daylight crept into the sky, they set off to make their own search, with the mistresses' full approval.

Far and wide they hunted the district, in scattered parties of twos and threes. Still no Madge, and still no news, no clues of any sort!

"What about the Festival?" Betty turned back to ask Audrey. "None of us girls in the choir want to go. I don't see how we can go! But you—"

"I shall go," said Audrey, tucking a stray wisp of hair into place. "Not that I want to, of course! But I entered for the Lady Lundy prize for the sake of the school and the Form, and I feel I ought to win it if I can, in spite of all this trouble."

Betty and Polly were silent.

"I feel," said Audrey softly, "Madge would be the very first girl to want me to carry on, notwithstanding what has happened. She puts music before everything else!"

Still silent, Betty and Polly walked away.

[END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.]

Will Audrey's mean plot succeed? Will she be able to triumph at the Barncombe Festival? Don't miss next week's long complete Morcov story, entitled "The Morcov Musicians!" It is simply thrilling. Order your copy at once.