

WONDERFUL NEWS FOR YOU ON PAGES 162 and 163!

The Schoolgirls' Own 2nd



**"GIRLS! THE PIER
IS ON FIRE!"**

A dramatic incident from
this week's long complete
tale of the Morcove pierrettes.

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THE GIRL WHO WAS KEPT PRISONER!



By MARJORIE STANTON.

When what appears to be an overwhelming disaster overtakes Betty Barton & Co., the schoolgirl pierettes, they little think that in reality it will turn out to be a blessing in disguise.

They Can't Make It Out!

THE day was hot and the ices were good. They were so good that Betty Barton and her chums of Morcove School had just ordered another each all round.

"Yes, wather!" was elegant Paula Creel's beaming remark, as she used the interval of waiting for the waitress to take a look at herself in the tea-room mirror. "That first stwawbewwy ice, geals, avoused wacollections of the dear old Cweamewy at Barncombe."

"Ze next ice-keem, he is to be ze two-colour!" little Naomer said quaintly, with an anticipatory smack of the lips. "Ooo, I wish they bring him queek!"

"Greedy," said Polly Linton, with mock severity. "How a real live queen can say such things, I don't know! Especially, Naomer darling, after the months and months you have had of our improving society, ahem!"

Paula went off into one of her fatuous chuckles at that.

"Haw, haw, haw! Improving society, bai Jove! Of course, it is quite wight to wealise that Naomer shares a study with me, at Morcove. Yes, wather! But pwecisely how you yourself have improved her Sewene Highness, Polly deah, I fail to gwasp. What?"

"Well, gwasp your ice whilst you can, for here they come!" said the madcap blithely, observing the waitress approaching with the noble array of glasses, each holding a tempting parti-coloured mould of ice-cream.

"This seaside town of Brightwell—I like it as well as any we have visited so far, on our tour as a concert party."

This was from Madge Minden, voiced in her usual sober way.

It was perhaps because the party of girls presented such a happy variety of sterling natures that other people in the tea-rooms were so taken with them.

Polly was so obviously the madcap of the party, just as Paula Creel was the spick-and-span young person with perhaps more beauty than brains!

Madge had the face of a dreamer; Tess, the rather keen look of a clever girl with some strong bent. Naomer Nakara, dark-skinned and black-haired, was like some roguish little goliwog! As for Betty Barton, the Form-captain, and Helen Craig, they were a combination of high spirits and sound common sense.

The ices went round, the waitress departed, and seven laden spoons rose slowly towards seven different pairs of pretty lips.

"Ooo," Naomer remarked, closing one eye, "he is colder than ze last!"

"All the same, Naomer darling, you must not wink at me," Polly again reproved her Majesty severely. "Always remember, Naomer, that in this country—Hallo, Ethel! Well, fancy this!"

For, very quietly, a well-grown girl of school age had suddenly come across to the Morcovians' table, murmuring a serene:

"Hallo, girls! I've been looking out for you to-day!"

Betty and all of them made a pleasant stir of delight. This was Ethel Courtway, the head girl of Morcove, who had thus dropped upon them in Brightwell's best refreshment-rooms. A tall, lady-like girl, Ethel was beloved by all her school-fellows, big or little.

"Yes, wather, bai Jove!" Paula beamed. "Have this chair, Ethel. Have an ice-cweam, do! They're wippers!"

"Skumptious!" Naomer confided, hastily resuming her consumption of the red-and-cream confection.

"No, I mustn't stay, thanks, because my people are outside, waiting for me. I just looked in to get a few things at the counter," Ethel explained. "We are coming to the concert to-night, of course—your concert!"

"As advertised," grinned Polly. "Proceeds, as you know, for the benefit of the hospital rebuilding fund. Come in your thousands!"

"Yes, wather—"
"And hear that famous contralto, Madame Paula Creel. Stand up and bow, Paula!" Polly

jested. "Oh, yes, Ethel, you must come to the show this evening on the pier!"

"We've booked our seats, so it's all right——"
 "Thank goodness, then we shall have at least three or four people for an audience!" Polly still jested on; and Ethel laughed along with the rest.

"Fancy talking like that," smiled Ethel, "when you have been playing to hundreds every evening! I read about you in the paper. How is Miss Redgrave, girls? I hope to see her before you leave Brightwell."

Between them the chums now gave their head girl full information about recent doings. Miss Redgrave was enjoying the tour thoroughly, as were they all. Money had poured in for the hospital rebuilding fund. And to-night's performance in the pavilion at the end of the pier looked like being a record one.

In return, Ethel gave a brief account of her holiday doings, as she stood by the seated girls, wishing she had not to tear herself away so hastily.

"We are here for a few days longer, then we motor on along the coast," she chatted in her quiet way. "Has Miss Redgrave heard from the headmistress lately, girls?"

"Yes, she had a letter this morning——"
 "Wather, bai Jove, and the news was wather distressing, what?" Paula simpered gravely.
 "Miss Wedgway asked us not to wowwy, but weally——"

"I have heard a rumour!" Ethel exclaimed, nodding gently. "There is some bother taking place at Morcove, whilst we are all on holiday; something about the property, but I don't know what."

"Neither do we," said Betty anxiously. "Let's hope it all blows over before we go back for another term. The dear old school——"

"Yes, wather! In any case, it's wotten to know that Miss Somerfield is having a lot of wowwy."

Ethel gave a nod to imply that she fully agreed. Then, with one of those bright and affectionate smiles for all the younger girls, she bade them good-bye.

"To-night, Ethel!" Polly had the last word, as the head girl was making for the shop-door. "And mind you bring a bouquet for our famous contralto! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now, Polly, dwop it—dwop teasing!" protested Paula, whilst Ethel departed, laughing. "I will not have you make these cwuel jests about my contwalto voice. It is twue, geals, I have had my distressing moments on the stage. But to-night I feel I am going to be weally in form."

"We must all be that!" laughed Betty. "It will be a terrific audience this time, for all the reserved seats are gone already!"

They finished their ices, then fared forth again into the sunshine and the sea-breeze, mingling with all those thousands of happy holiday-makers who were in Brightwell just at present.

At the pier entrance they fell in with Miss Redgrave again. She was just coming off the pier, having been out to the pavilion at the far end, to attend to a few business details in connection with the concert. And here, just by the pier turnstiles, Betty & Co. felt just as embarrassed as usual, because of the large coloured placards advertising their charity tour.

The chums were much too shy of publicity to be able to see people standing round those posters without colouring up and not knowing where to look.

"And the worst of it is," deplored Polly, in a

mock-serious tone, "wherever we go, Naomer gives us away!"

"Yes, wather—haw, haw, haw! Naomer, you wascal——"

"I not a raskikkle!" protested her Serene Highness, looking quite ready to make an excitable skirmish round the spick-and-span one. "No, no, zey look at you, Paula, because you are ze reech contralto singer, yes!"

"You weally think they do?" Paula said, unable to help looking pleased. "Fame is a dweadful thing, Naomer, what? To think that my reputation, bai Jove, has spweed all through the kingdom pewhaps!"

"It is a solemn thought!" said Polly tragically. "But, girls, what about going back to the boarding-house now, to see if there's any letter from Amy Ashdown? The post will be in."

"Certainly!" Betty agreed earnestly, and murmurs to the same effect came from the others. "It would be nice if we had a line from Amy—even a postcard——"

"A weal welief, geals, yes, wather!"

"I can't imagine why she doesn't write," Helen Craig said gravely. "We have been sending her lots of picture-postcards, ever since she left us to resume her situation with the owners of the Grange."

"And she did seem to get so fond of us, too," was Tess' quiet rejoinder. "You would have thought she would have followed up that farewell telegram with a letter."

This brought Miss Redgrave into the talk. "Are you girls saying how strange it is that Amy Ashdown doesn't write? I quite agree, girls; it would be a load off my mind, too, if we had only a line. Yet we haven't the least reason for supposing that she is not going on all right."

Their boarding-house was just across the way, on the sea-front, and suddenly this growing anxiety for news took Polly with an eager scamper to the boarding-house steps. She was into the house and out again by the time the others reached the steps.

"No, no letter—no news of any sort!" was her disappointing announcement. "The post's in, but nothing has come from Amy!"

"Well——"

"Bai Jove——"

"What ever can the reason be?"

"We can only suppose that she has been simply too busy to find time even for a line," murmured Betty, with gathered brows.

Only a simple reason of that sort to account for Amy Ashdown's strange silence!

And, indeed, of what other explanation were the girls or Miss Redgrave likely to think, all in the dark as they were as to that cruel trickery by which poor, ill-fated Amy had been trapped at the lonely country mansion?

Amy at Bay!

AT that very moment when the schoolgirl pierrettes were wondering why Amy Ashdown had not written, fifty miles away, a certain woman was making for the Grange in a most cautious, wary manner.

Laura Dillon's mother!
 Here she was, come down in secret from London to rejoin her daughter at that lonely house outside Sandmouth which was supposed to be deserted and locked up.

Mrs. Dillon was not to be recognised at present

as the dressy lady who, with her husband and daughter, had recently tenanted the Grange.

Nothing could disguise the woman's handsome looks; but she had been at pains to dress very plainly, almost shabbily, to-day. Nor did she walk with that high and haughty step which handsome young Laura had inherited along with the mother's audacious nature.

Mrs. Dillon, in fact, looked just like some poor person who had been out of work for some time as she came across the wide meadows lying behind the Grange.

Anybody seeing her would have imagined her to be footing it wearily all the way from some outlying parish to the distant seaside town of Sandmouth. But Mrs. Dillon was nigh to the end of her long tramp now—the five-mile trudge which had been hers when she alighted from a London train at a lonely wayside station.

This field she was crossing now—it was the last she must traverse before entering the private parklands lying around the great old country house. And so she looked about her all the more warily, intending to keep away from the house itself if there should be anybody to see her.

But there was no one. After letting herself through a private gateway, she could slink through bits of woodland, and creep from one shrubbery to another, until at last she reached the house.

Two gentle raps upon a panel; a pause, then another distinct rap-rap! Such was the signal she had arranged to give, so that Laura and Cora might be certain who it was demanding admission.

Even so, two pairs of handsome, girlish eyes peered from a window commanding the back doorstep, before that pre-arranged knocking at the door brought Laura and Cora creeping along a rear passage, to turn back the key and draw the bolts.

"At last, mother!"

That was Laura's guarded exclamation of delight as Mrs. Dillon hastily stepped into the house. Quickly the door was closed, locked, and bolted again, and then the new arrival threw off her furtive, uneasy expression.

"Yes, Laura, here I am at last! Well, Cora dear, you are still sharing the—the fun, shall I call it?"

Both girls looked at each other and grinned. "It really has been a scream," Cora Grandways declared, "the way we have gone on living here, your daughter and I, and no one any the wiser!"

"How about Amy Ashdown? Has she learned her lesson yet?" Mrs. Dillon asked, still smiling darkly.

"She is just as obstinate as ever, if that's what you mean, mother," Laura answered, with a sudden, fierce look. "She simply will not give in, the obstinate little thing! Cora and I have asked her again and again to tell us where the paper is hidden. We have even threatened her, and still she won't speak out!"

"Indeed," was the lady's comment, spoken with a dryness that boded ill for poor Amy Ashdown. "But I am here now, and she will soon know the difference!"

"So we warned her," Cora exclaimed tensely. "Of course, Mrs. Dillon, you are not going to—not going to go to extremes with the girl, are you? Because I—I—I wouldn't like to be mixed up in any trouble that came about afterwards, if Amy complained."

"I am not one for half measures, Cora, as you must be aware by this time," Mrs. Dillon

said in a high and cold way. "All the same, it would be mere stupidity for me to go to extremes with the girl before I have exhausted other means of breaking that hussy's spirit! I will go up to her at once!"

Nothing more was said. Leaving Laura to show her mother the way upstairs, Cora came last of the three of them, and so they did not observe her rather uneasy looks.

The girl who was the bane of the Fourth Form at Morcove had begun to feel that the "joke" was being carried perhaps a bit too far.

Here she was, taking a full share in the whole daring scheme, and she might well wonder how she was to come off in the end.

Her love of spiting Betty & Co., and a malicious



NOT TO BE INTIMIDATED.

"There has been enough of bandying words and wasting time," cried Mrs. Dillon, facing Amy.

"You are to tell me where that paper is!"

"I shall not tell you!" answered the fearless girl calmly.

delight in seeing poor Amy Ashdown victimised and bullied, had made her enter heart and soul into all that had happened lately. But now—

She was realising better than she had at first that the Dillons had a strong inducement to resort to really desperate means in the end to get the secret out of Amy. Leading that girl a life of sheer persecution was all very well, if it were only done to gratify one's love of bullying. This was Cora's opinion. But the Dillons were actuated by the most serious motives.

Upon this one thing—whether Amy could be compelled or not to disclose the whereabouts of the hidden cipher—must turn the success or failure of a tremendous project. The Dillons were out to enrich themselves by discovering the reputed treasure hidden somewhere within the walls of this old house. Without that cipher document they never would find the treasure—never!

Hence the uneasiness with which Cora was filled

now that Mrs. Dillon had arrived upon the scene. That woman was not one to stop at half measures—no! Supposing, then, things came to a crisis?

All Cora could say to herself to ease her mind was that she would be able, at any time, to drop out of the whole affair. Without saying anything to the Dillons, she could suddenly slip away, and so wash her hands of them.

But what she yet hoped was to see Amy give in weakly, and then—how thrilling it would be, when the ancient cipher had been disclosed, to have a hand in hunting for the treasure itself!

Is There No Escape For Her ?

"THIS is the room, mother," Laura said softly, as they came to a dim landing at the very top of the huge old house. "She hasn't tried to get away, and she couldn't do any good for herself even if she did try. Cora and I have seen to that!"

Then the key was turned back, and Mrs. Dillon herself sent the door slowly wide open. As she did so, she drew herself up and took care to look as harsh and threatening as possible.

"Amy Ashdown, I have come, you see!"

The words were spoken ominously to the hapless inmate of this bare room. She was standing between the table and the window, which latter had had some old-fashioned shutters screwed shut. It was a strange effect for the hot summer sunshine to be glinting into this cool and darkened room through just a few small thumbholes in the shutters.

"Come here, girl! I want to ask you—you know what!"

But the low and threatening voice left plucky Amy Ashdown quite unmoved. As if her strong spirit was only made stronger still by the presence of Mrs. Dillon, she held herself erect and defiant.

"You have been here several days now, Amy," the woman continued, looking enraged at the girl's stubborn silence. "Time enough for you to have come to your senses! Don't you want to be free to go out into the sunshine again—back to any friends you have?"

"Not at the price you will make me pay for freedom," was the steady answer. "You have no right, as I have said again and again, to be wanting to lay hands on that treasure. If there is a treasure in this house, it belongs to the owners of the place, who are abroad. You are merely a pack of thieves—"

"Don't give me any of your impudence, girl!" Mrs. Dillon exclaimed fiercely, taking a stride towards Amy. "Do you think my patience is inexhaustible? There has been enough of bandying words and wasting time! You are to tell me where that paper is—"

"I shall not tell you!"

"And I say you must and shall!" the woman seethed, stamping a foot. "Before another day and night have gone by that paper is to be in my hands!"

"Come on, Amy, speak out and get it over!" urged Cora.

"Obstinate little thing!" was Laura's harsh comment. "My word, she'll be sorry if she doesn't take care, now mother is here. Speak out, d'you hear!"

Then Amy merely turned aside, a shrug of scorn her only answer.

"Very well," Mrs. Dillon said, after standing

tight-lipped for a few moments. "Go back downstairs, you two girls, and I will come with you. I have walked far and must rest and have something to eat. But later on—ah, my girl," she warned the hapless prisoner sternly, "I shall know the remedy for such obstinacy!"

Then the door closed, and the key was turned, leaving Amy all alone once more, with those thin beams of sunshine striking in upon her through the gloom.

Poor girl! What wonder if she suddenly put up both hands to her face and could only just keep from sobbing aloud?

How—how was it all going to end! That woman here, now! A woman whose every word and look meant more than mere blustering threats.

For the hundredth time, perhaps, the cooped-up girl wandered round the darkened room. As she had done dozens of times before, she stood by the locked door, gazing desperately. No use! A hammer and chisel and other implements would be needed before the lock could be prised or the woodwork tampered with.

Then the window—again, hopeless! The old-fashioned shutters had been screwed up. Even if they could be forced open, there would be no escape by the window. Impossible to clamber down; impossible to scramble up to the roof and get away like that. One would need a strong, fifty-foot length of rope to be able to slide down it to the ground. Door and window alike were hopeless!

Suddenly, however, as she stood with bent head and gaze dejectedly cast down, an idea flashed upon her, thrilling her through and through.

The floor—what about the floor!

Never until this moment had she given a thought to this possibility. If by any chance she could take up a short length of floorboarding, then it might be possible to break through to the room underneath.

If only a board could be raised, surely she would have merely the lath and plaster of the ceiling beneath it to reckon with. She would have to be extremely careful how she broke through the mortar, lest it should make a noise by falling in the room that was under this one. But there, she could work away as slowly and quietly as a mouse!

What Next Will She Find ?

TREMBLING with excitement, she now began to go over every inch of the floor, looking out for a likely board—one that showed signs of being loose. The poor light was cruelly exasperating, and soon she was down on hands and knees in the darker corners, where she had to peer ever so closely to see anything at all.

If only, somewhere in the room, there was a plank that could be dislodged by some desperate means or other! Oh, it seemed maddeningly certain to her, poor girl, that the rest would be easy! Even if it took her hour after hour, when she had pulled up a bit of the boarding, she would get a hole worked right through, and so be able, in the end, to drop down into the room below!

But there was no bit of boarding starting out of its place with age; no bit so decayed that she, poor desperate prisoner that she was, could pick it to pieces with her fingers.

"If I had a knife—scissors—anything!" was her wistful thought. "But those wretches have taken good care not to leave me anything like that. Oh, how crafty they are, as well as cruel!"

Then, suddenly, another idea! Up she sprang.

from her kneeling position, looking around the walls excitedly, eagerly. A nail—was there no nail or hook that could be broken out of the wall and then sharpened? If there was, she would manage somehow to shape an edge. There was the hearthstone to the fireplace—just the thing for the purpose.

Another moment and she was almost bounding towards one of the walls in joyful excitement over what was there. A great old rusty nail, driven into the wall years and years ago, to serve as a peg upon which to hang clothes or a picture!

She could only just reach it, but by fetching a chair and standing upon that she soon got to work with desperate energy.

This way and that she pulled and dragged at the mighty nail, exhausting herself long before the frantic efforts took effect. After a breathing space, she returned to the attack, and now the nail seemed to be willing to come out of the wall. Hurrah!

She kept on at the desperate task—one that made her arms and shoulder-muscles ache, and left her hands cruelly cramped. Poor little fingers, they had often had to work hard, but never as hard as this.

But she got her reward, indomitable spirit that she was. At last the nail came away from the wall, and she jumped down from the chair. Putting the latter just where it had stood before she used it, Amy examined her prize.

The nail was quite five inches long and very thick. If she sharpened one end of it on the hearthstone, she could use it as a means of chiselling across one plank. A laborious job it was going to be, but better that, than idly to await the cruelty of merciless Mrs. Dillon!

To the fireplace she nipped, and went upon her knees again, to start grinding an edge to the nail. As she began, she was thinking that she could re-sharpen the edge from time to time, and that would help a lot.

But now, kneeling there, she noticed that the hearthstone was cracked, and that she could easily prise away one bit, thus enabling herself to use the fragment as a grindstone in a less awkward position.

The nail helped her to prize up a portion of stone that was the smallest piece which had been fractured. In a minute or so she had the irregularly shaped piece out of its resting place. She was going to stand up and take it to the table, but as her hand took hold of the bit of stone, she realised that there was an empty space underneath.

Next second Amy was excitedly putting her hand into the small hole that had been disclosed by removing the fragment of stone slab.

Down and down went her groping hand, meeting with nothing—only empty space! She changed from a kneeling position to a prone one, so as to be able to thrust her right arm to its full length down into the hole.

Nothing! No woodwork for her groping hand to brush against; no rough mortar for her fingertips to touch. What was down there then?

So she was wondering, excitedly, realising that this strange discovery might be going to save her the trouble of cutting through a floorboard.

In the end, she reached her arm down as far as it could possibly go, still without touching anything.

That was good enough for Amy!

Hardly pausing for breath, she knelt up again and set about shifting aside further portions of the fractured stone slab.

One by one she lifted aside bits, each as big as a dinner plate. Under these there ran joists, and for that reason the fractured stone had been saved from falling in. But the joists were set wide apart, and the great thing was that underneath them there was mere black nothingness.

"If only I had a light!" she panted to herself, peering down frantically when she had opened out quite a big hole. "What does it mean, such a big empty space except for these one or two joists? Shall I try and get down into the hole?"

Why not? Why hesitate for a moment? In an old house of this sort, there was no knowing for what the dark cavity under the hearthstone had been designed.

Looking round cautiously towards the door that had been so cruelly locked upon her, she dropped her feet through the hole and then wriggled herself down.

It was a tight squeeze for her, in between the joists, but she could just manage by taking it slowly.

So, by degrees she got herself so far down that only head, neck, and hands were level with the floor of her prison. She was now clinging to the joists, and she knew the exertion she was to be put to, when she let herself go down and hung by her hands, her feet perhaps touching nothing. She would have to heave herself up again, a very strenuous bit of gymnastics.

And now her thought was—if only she had someone with her. Any fellow-prisoner could have hauled her back again easily. But she was alone, and alone she had got to take this thrilling, desperate chance.

Down she dropped, hanging by her hands to the joists. And, strange—still there was no footing below, in the groping darkness. Nothing for her to touch with her toe-tips, no matter how she swung herself about, feeling with her feet for a hold.

Nothing!

Yet, of course, there must be some bottom to the cavity. The question was, how far down? How had such a great dark cavity come to exist?

With a sudden awful feeling that her strength was giving out, desperately she strained and struggled to raise herself, and she came up out of the hole gasping for breath, and with her arms aching violently.

She fairly rolled out on to the floor, to lie there exhausted, panting for breath. Then, with another uneasy look towards the door, she returned her excited gaze to the hole.

What was down there? Dared she take her chance and let herself drop! No, no, it might be a chimney shaft, and she would drop like a plummet in a well! But what was down there? She must know, oh, she must find out—yet how?

Even as she was having these frantic thoughts, a sound outside the room gave warning of Mrs. Dillon's return.

Quick as a flash, Amy fitted the pieces of stone back into position, then stood up, getting herself shaken to rights as the key turned back in the lock, and the door swung open.

Not in the Programme!

"SOWWY I'm late, gals! I wouldn't have washed myself up like this, for wowlids!"

Paula Creel spoke the words breathlessly, as she came hurrying into the dressing-room behind the stage of the Pier Pavilion, at Brightwell.

It was close upon eight o'clock, and already Paula's chums were, most of them, arrayed in



AMY'S DISCOVERY. Immediately Amy was putting her hand into the small hole which had been disclosed by removing the piece of stone slab. Down went her groping hand, meeting with only empty space!

stage costume. Dress-baskets had given up their pretty dresses once again, and another minute would find all save Paula in charming pierrette garb.

But Paula herself—she was late, and no mistake! "Yes, wather, bai Jove!" that amiable duffer palpitated, as Betty and Polly made room for her at one of the dressing-tables. "I merely wan upstairs at the boarding-house, to put my hair to wights, and suddenly I found that you geals had all gone, bai Jove."

"Shall we make an announcement that the great soprano has arrived after all?" Polly asked Betty, with a roguish wink.

"Contwaltz, Polly dear; not sopwano. Howevah, I will sing sopwano for a change, if you think the audience would pvefer it?" Paula offered obligingly.

"We won't ask the audience what they would prefer you to do!" Polly said, with a grin. "Was there a rumour—"

"That I was not going to sing?" gasped Paula. She almost turned pale. "My gwacious, the false weport must be countewacted at once. I wather noticed a lot of people leaving the pier, as I came through the turnstiles."

"They were probably leaving," Polly said demurely, "because of a rumour that you would sing after all! But don't let that worry you! Some brave souls will sit it out!"

"Polly deah, how you do tease a geal," sighed poor Paula, whilst she sat down and whipped off her walking shoes. "You weally are jealous, you know. Why be so unweasonable? Can I healp the voice that nature has given me?"

"Paula, you cannot, and that's why I always say, we must put up with it," the merciless teaser

answered. "What can't be cured must be endured. Want any help, dear?"

"Go away, Polly; you aggyvavate me," Paula said, really touchily. "And don't you, Naomer, come cewdowing wound me, because—"

"Queek, queek, off that chair you sit on my frock!" was Naomer's excitable cry, whilst she suddenly precipitated Paula on to the floor by up ending the chair. "He, he, he! I very sorry, but I am in ze hurry."

"Sowwy, bai Jove! In a huwwy, you say! What about me?" wailed Paula, scrambling up. "Heah, one of you geals—Madge deah; you're not fwivolous! Healp me to get dwessed, pway do!"

Madge herself was looking extremely pretty in her pierrette costume. Yet the sedate and dreamy character was still apparent, as it always was, whatever Madge the pianist wore. Lucky Paula, just then, to have such a calm chum to help her on with the stage frock!

"Bai Jove, you are a bwick, Madge deah," Paula chattered on, as the last touches to her toilette were being given. "Of course, we geals could do with Amy Ashdown amongst us again. Howevah—shoes, all wight? Yes, wather, what? Hair all wight? Haw, haw, haw, this is bettah, Madge deah!"

Thus the fatuous one rapidly arrived at a stage of beaming self-admiration, as she looked at herself in the glass, all complete, as it were. She put her head forward to get a close look, then she drew back, and felt more pleased than ever. Then she backed another step, and trod on someone's toes.

They were Naomer's.

"Ooo, you seely, clumsy duffer! Ooo—"

"Sowwy, Naomer! Pway accept my pwofuse apologies! Weally—"

"I not able to dance now!"

"That's tewwible," lamented Paula. "Howevah, it's all wight. I'll sing a few extwas, Naomer darling, what? Yes, wather. I'm in gwand form this evening! I could wawble—"

"Well, don't warble here!" interposed Polly, suddenly taking a comb and brush out of Paula's hands. "Going on, Madge? Good luck once again at the start, then!"

For now, if the schoolgirl pierrettes were to begin, as it was their golden rule to do, on the stroke of eight, Madge was due in front of the audience.

What a packed audience it was, too, this evening!

Hours ago every bookable seat in the pavilion had been sold, and when the doors opened the cheaper seats had quickly filled to overflowing. Madge, as she made her unassuming entry, standing by the piano to give just a bow or so in response to the applause, had the impression that people were perched on window-sills and mounted on forms right at the back of the hall.

Ethel Courtway and her people were in one of the forward rows. As soon as Betty and the rest ran on to give the witty opening chorus, they saw their head girl and her relations in Row 3. And somehow the girls felt that it was more important than ever that they should give a first-rate entertainment this evening. Ethel's good opinion had a mysterious way of counting for so much, always!

That Morcovese head girl was soon glowing with pride at what Morcovese's Study 12 chums were doing, to bring in money for charity, anybody could soon have guessed. Not that Ethel was very demonstrative in her applause. There were many

who clapped louder than she. In her pretty eyes, however, there was a sort of shining light that came of pride and loving admiration where Betty & Co. were concerned.

The schoolgirl pierrettes were always introducing fresh features into their programme, and this evening Tess went on to do some lightning sketches, in charcoal.

It was a new "turn" that made a tremendous hit.

Tess stood at a blackboard and easel which faced the vast audience. Against the blackboard were pinned some dozen large sheets of drawing paper, one upon another. As fast as one lightning sketch was finished, Tess tore it off, and was ready to dash off another sketch on the fresh sheet which had been disclosed.

Some of the sketches were caricatures of celebrities, and roars of laughter mingled with the applause as the audience, recognised the clever portraits. This delight seemed to reach its climax when Tess caricatured a local celebrity—the portly piermaster.

But there was even better to come.

Suddenly Tess scribbled with charcoal over another sheet very swiftly for a few seconds—no more—and then she scribbled the title underneath, plain for all to see:

"OUR STAR SINGER!"

It was, in fact, a comic sketch of Paula Creel that Tess had cleverly hit off. shrieks of laughter began, and they went on until people were almost in convulsions, for Tess's sketch showed Paula screeching out a top note, with her hands holding the music at arm's length. There was a clever likeness, and yet there was a grotesque exaggeration.

The laughter and applause was only just dying away when someone in the stalls called out:

"May I buy that sketch, please, to help the hospital fund?"

There was a sensation, not only amongst the audience, but amongst Betty & Co. Here was a new source of audience!

"Certainly!" Tess answered pleasantly. "You are welcome to it, sir, for anything you like to give towards the rebuilding fund."

"Will a guinea be all right?"

A guinea!

"Bai Jove," gasped Paula, standing in the wings with Betty and others, "a guinea for a powtwait of me! That's fame, geals, what, with a vengeance!"

The transaction was completed in a few moments, and then people started bidding for the other sketches.

Fantastic prices were offered for caricatures of celebrities. The piermaster himself fetched a guinea, rather to Paula's disgust. When she remembered the hospital fund, however, she could make allowances for such a "widelous pwice" being paid for the "powtwait" of a person of no particular importance!

Perhaps it was because Paula had been caricatured; anyhow, this evening she received a tremendous ovation when she went on to sing. What Ethel Courtway's apprehensions were just then may be imagined—the same as Paula's chums' feelings always were when the "wich contwalto" was facing the footlights!

To-night, however, Paula did really well. Her voice was never as good as Paula herself imagined. On the other hand, it was never as bad as Polly teasingly made it out to be. Feeling that she had

a great reputation to maintain, Paula sang for all she was worth, and got through very well indeed. Two songs she gave, and then it was:

"Encore, encore! Bravo! Encore!"

Beaming with delight, the "wich contwalto" stepped aside to let Madge, the pianist, know what accompaniment to play for the encore. Instantly the audience hushed down, to hear Madge set the beautiful music rippling forth, but that third song of Paula's—it was fated never to be given!

Even as the girl singer returned to the centre of the stage, she became aware of a certain stir that had begun in the body of the pavilion.

Madge noticed it, too. So did the girls who were in the wings. The audience was strangely restless, and numbers were starting to exchange excited whispers.

Before there had been even a moment for Betty and the rest to wonder what was wrong, Miss Redgrave came quickly to where they were standing in the wings. She looked very pale and alarmed as she whispered:

"Girls, we must do all we can to avert a panic! The pier is on fire!"

The Morocco Way!

THE first effect of that dismaying announcement was a dazing one.

Betty, Polly, all of them, they stood agasp, staring incredulously at Miss Redgrave.

The pier on fire!

And here, in this pavilion at the far end of the pier, were hundreds of people! How would they all get away?

"Whereabouts is the fire?" Betty exclaimed, as soon as she could get her voice to function.



TO AVERT A PANIC! "Ladies and gentlemen!" shouted Betty, as calmly as she could. "Don't run away. There is no danger. Take it quietly!" The words were simple, but they drew tremendous cheering.

"In the centre!" was Miss Redgrave's agitated answer. "It began with a sudden blaze at a kiosk. The wind is strong, and in a few moments the flames were spreading right across the wooden deck."

"Then we—everybody at this end—we are cut off!" gasped Polly. "There's no danger, though?"

"There may be a panic," said Miss Redgrave, in great uneasiness. "That's what we have to—"

She said no more, or, if she did, her listeners failed to hear it.

Paula had pluckily begun her song, in spite of the mysterious restlessness. Now the girl's voice was overwhelmed by sudden absolute commotion in the audience. People were getting up to rush out. Being the panicky ones, they made a lot of noise as they scrambled for the exits.

"Hold the rest—keep them calm somehow!" was Miss Redgrave's desperate entreaty to the girls.

Nor was the appeal made in vain.

Next second, Betty, Polly, Naome, Tess, and Helen, they all romped out into full view of the audience, and lined up to give one of their tuneful and witty choruses. Betty called to Madge which one to play, and that girl—trust Madge to keep her head!—immediately switched into the desired tune.

There, then, on the stage, the schoolgirl pierrettes stood lined up, singing away as calmly and happily as if nothing was the matter, although their united voices were almost lost amidst the commotion made by the audience.

With the greatest difficulty, were numbers of people keeping their seats. Others, in sheer panic, were blundering towards the exits. Some, the most excitable of all, were starting to shout madly because they could not get out fast enough.

At last it was no use the girls singing on any longer, and Betty made a sign to her chums to break off, so that she might speak.

"Ladies and gentlemen," Betty shouted as calmly as she could, "don't run away, because there is really nowhere to run! Take it quietly, anyhow!"

Simpler words could not have been voiced, yet they drew tremendous cheering. The panic was stayed. In orderly fashion, after that the audience thinned away, the schoolgirl pierrettes singing away once more, until there was hardly a soul left to hear them.

Then, with a sort of sober punctiliousness that it was just like Madge to show, that girl struck off a bar or so of the National Anthem before she calmly closed the piano and went with her chums and Miss Redgrave into the open air.

The cloudy evening was already darkening into night, and so the flames that flared midway along the pier made a brilliant glow.

The raging fire had cut right across the pier, and the set of the wind was causing the conflagration to creep this way.

Thus, the hundreds of people who had been attending the performance were not only quite cut off from the land, but were being driven back by the heat and smoke.

The same panicky souls were to be seen dashing this way and that. Some ran down the steps to the iron gratings level with the sea, only to come rushing up to the top deck again, wringing their hands despairingly.

"We can't get away! There are no boats!" was the terrified yell that mingled with the din. "They'll never get us off in time!"

"Well, washing around won't do any good!" Paula rebuked one frantic-looking individual who

was helping to aggravate the panic. He looked like a foreigner. "Good gwacious, you call yourself a man, bai Jove!"

Brighter still the glare from the raging fire became, making what could be seen of the sea-front look as if it was aglow in the light from a stormy sunset.

Betty and her chums rushed to their dressing-room, and changed into ordinary attire. Then they came out on to the open deck again, and saw that every available boat was coming out over the lurid waters, to take people off.

In a couple of minutes the first loads of humanity were being got away. The excitement was tremendous, but the worst of the panic was now over. "Women and children first!" was the general cry, and, whilst crowds of people were yet waiting to be rowed to the shore, Betty & Co. were offered places in the boats.

"We're in no hurry, thanks!" they said, Paula joining in with:

"Wather not, bai Jove! Thanks—thanks, all the same, don't you know!"

And Miss Redgrave, who had purposely left the girls to go or remain, just as they themselves preferred, felt prouder of them than ever.

It was a full half-hour after this that the chums encountered Ethel Courtway on the main deck, just outside the pavilion.

"Still here!" laughed Ethel.

"Oh, yes!"

"Yes, wather! Haw, haw, haw! I expect I look a fright, Ethel!"

"Only, you don't look frightened—that's the difference!" was the admiring comment of Morcove's head girl. "Bravo, Morcove! Well, we shall soon get away now!"

Nor was it more than fifteen minutes later when they embarked in a big rowboat, two or three of them telling the bearded old fellow whose boat it was that he must let them have the oars. He had already made a couple of journeys to the beach, and could do with a rest.

Calmly and steadily, the girls pulled for the shore, rowing past the burning portion of the pier at close quarters. It was a grand, yet sad, sight to see a whole stretch of the old timber-built pier fiercely ablaze in the darkness, the flames creeping steadily outwards to the pavilion.

"My gwacious, and what about our stage frocks and things, if the fire destwoys the pavilion?" Paula suddenly gasped.

"Bother frocks!" laughed Polly lightly. "What do they matter; so long as everybody gets away safely—and they will now! Look—look, there are some more boats going out empty, to fetch away the last of our audience!"

Safely ashore at last, far into the night the chums of Study 12, with Miss Redgrave, watched the pier burning. All efforts to cope with the fire were ineffectual, the wind blowing so freshly. It was, alas, a case of seeing the pavilion go up in flames, the outer end of the pier itself burning to the water's edge.

With such a thrilling sight as this to watch, the chums could not give a thought to what their own personal loss was to be. Not until morning had come again would they realise that costumes, music, dressing-baskets—everything connected with the charity concerts—had been lost in the flames.

Nor would they realise even then in what a fateful way the burning of Brightwell Pier was to connect them, once again, with the strange career of plucky Amy Ashdown!

What Amy Found!

"HERE'S your dinner!" Mrs. Dillon plumped a tray down just inside the door of Amy's prison chamber. She scarcely glanced at Amy, standing by the fireplace. She was evidently in a hurry, for she retired quickly, locking the door after her.

Amy partook of the poor fare, and then prepared herself for a long wait. Hour after hour she allowed to pass by as she waited for the first ray of moonlight to filter into the room.

At last one ghostly beam penetrated through a ventilation-hole in the old-fashioned shutters, and its light pierced the black darkness of the room.

Amy got off the pallet bed on which she had been lying, fully dressed.

She was not so foolish as to expect the moonlight to show her what she had not been able to see by daylight. The cavity under the old hearthstone must still remain a black void to her eager, peering eyes. But she could now take advantage of the moonlight to do certain things that it would have been rash to undertake in total darkness.

For that reason had she waited and waited, hoping to see some moonlight break into the room at some time or other in the course of the night.

Standing fully dressed by the bed, but with nothing on her feet save stockings, quickly the desperate girl twisted and knotted all the bed-coverings into a line. They gave her a length of about twelve feet—not much, when several feet would be required for tying one end securely to a stay. Perhaps, however, even the remaining length of line that would be dangling down into the mysterious abyss would prove sufficient.

For her purpose was to lower herself down as far as possible, to see if she could not find a footing somewhere. A hazardous, desperate venture! One well worth while, however, after the cruel threats there had been in Mrs. Dillon's last words to-night.

Where could she make the line fast?

Amy had thought it all out whilst waiting for the friendly moonlight. Without a sound she now removed everything from the small table and turned it right upside down. Then she shifted it noiselessly close alongside the hearthstone.

She now had one of the upturned table legs as a post to which she could secure the line. The table might drag just a little when it took the strain presently, but she reckoned that it would not shift to any dangerous extent, the pull being a downward one.

Soon she had the coiled blankets tied and doubly tied by one end to the table leg nearest the hearth. That done, she knelt down and quickly removed the several pieces of hearthstone.

All was then ready, and it was for her to gather her breath and nerve herself for the venture that sheer desperation bade her make.

As before, she wriggled down, feet foremost, through the space between the floor-joists, her hands grasping the timbers. But on the previous occasion she had merely let herself hang by her hands from the joists; now she was to take hold of the rope and slowly let her full weight bear upon it.

Moment by moment she let the line take more and more of her weight. The makeshift rope was certainly standing the strain quite well—after all, her bodily weight was not considerable. And so, reassured on this point, she took her chance, let go her last hold on the timbers, and began to slither down the line.

Now she was dangling in that mysterious abyss,

with unplumbed depths beneath her. Last time her feet had not touched bottom. Would they this time?

Down and down, inch by inch and hand under hand—down into the black darkness of this mysterious cavity. Nothing yet for her toe-tips to touch against. And all so quickly she was getting down to the very limit of the dangling line!

If only she could find a foothold, instead of having to clamber back, baffled! All this frantic suspense and tremendous exertion because she was without a light—cruel wretches that her captors were not to allow her one! Ah, if she could but have shone a light down into the cavity!

Hallo, something at last for her dangling feet to kick against! And now—now they were able to stay at rest, securely set upon some sort of foothold, whilst she still had hold of the line.

The relief it meant, the joy to her, poor girl! Even if she should feel afraid to move an inch in such black and mysterious surroundings, she could at least enjoy a rest before hauling herself up again.

Cautiously she stood for several moments without stirring either of her feet by so much as an inch. Then, having got her breath back, and still taking care to keep hold on the rope, she moved one foot outwards, feeling for a fresh resting-place.

Hers was the thrilling sensation just then of feeling about in the dark for a step that was not there. But all at once she trod firmly with that venturing foot, and she could have shouted a joyful "Hurrah!" She was going to be able to move around, feeling with her hands to find out what these surroundings were—whether secret chamber or secret flight of steps, or only a blind cavity in an ill-planned, ancient house.

Amy let go the dangling line and ventured another step. Instantly she realised that she had a most uneven surface to reckon with. If this was a secret chamber, it had a floor of very rough brickwork. But was it a secret room? Far more likely to be a mere chance cavity, because—

What was this, though! Steps—stone steps, falling away in front of her as steeply as a ladder is set against a house wall!

Safe to venture? Why not? And next moment she was going down, ever so slowly, hands brushing the cold and crumbling masonry that hemmed her in.

Now, too, her heart was beating faster than ever. Since this was some secret passage-way in the house, what if it was somewhere down here that the supposed treasure lay hidden!

That was Amy's excited thought as she went creeping on down the rough steps, still in total darkness. She might be going to come upon some crypt-like place where the monk of old had hidden the riches.

"But I mustn't let myself get too eager," she said to herself, "or I shall be meeting with a bad slip. These steps—how awfully steep and uneven they are!"

Nor had she gone down half a dozen more before the need for extreme caution became greater than ever. The steps took a right-angle turn, then went up instead of down.

After that Amy was simply in a maze, feeling her way on and on in groping darkness, nerved to do so by the thought that, at the worst, she could always find her way back.

Then suddenly, when she knew not where she was in the great old house, whether high up or near the ground—there had been so much going

up these steps and going down those others—she met with a joyful surprise.

The moonlight again! Here it was, shining in upon her through an iron-gridded hole in the wall. The grid was just level with her face, and she had only to step closer to be able to see out, and—oh, the joy to her!—the open ground was not ten feet below.

Amy wanted to explore the secret ramifications of the place no further now. This iron grid—if only she could break it away, she would be able to squeeze through and then drop to the ground. She would be free—free to rush off and tell the police about the Dillons.

"No, not the police," she suddenly decided, "for I don't want that girl Cora Grandways to be mixed up in any police-court business. She is a Morcove girl, and it would bring disgrace upon her school. I'll get on the track of Betty Barton and the rest, if only—oh, if only I am able to get away from here!"

She stood there, the moonlight striking in upon her white and tense face, as she fumbled with the thin iron bars. They were built into the brick-work, but they were greatly rusted away by exposure to centuries of weather. Her fingers easily flaked away quantities of rust. Then she guessed that most likely the iron itself had always been soft. She tried pulling and straining at one bar, and it bent easily at a weather-worn spot. Another minute, and she had that broken bar pulled out in two pieces.

Desperately she worked away at others after that, and two more of them she served like the first, after great exertion. A fourth she twisted aside, which done, it seemed to her that she stood a chance of squeezing through.

Then it was that an appalling thought suddenly arrested her.

If she got away now, what of the morning, when Mrs. Dillon came to the locked room back yonder at the top of the house?

The woman would see the fractured hearthstone lying on one side; she would be exploring the secret passage herself before a minute was out.

"And then she'll do what I have not done yet—she'll find the treasure!" was Amy's dismayed thought. "I must go to the police at once, then, when I get away—now, in the dead of night! And Betty Barton and the rest, they must forgive me, if I am the means of bringing disgrace upon one of their schoolfellows, pity that it is. Oh, a thousand pities!"

Splendid girl that she was, to have a thought for Morcove's good name in such a desperate extremity as this!

She could not get it out of her mind. If she went to the police to-night, Cora Grandways would be mixed up in all the bother and publicity. Nor could she forget how kind Betty and the others had been to her, Amy, befriending her at a time when she so needed friendship.

"No, I can't go to the police—for the sake of those girls, no!" she decided flatly at last. "But what am I to do, then, to get away from here, and yet not let Mrs. Dillon see how I escaped?"

Could ever a position have been more perplexing?

Here she was, with freedom actually in front of her; yet to go free meant leaving her recent prison chamber in that tell-tale state—the fractured hearthstone shifted aside, the line dangling down into the darkness below.

She could indeed run to the police, and they would come here before even Mrs. Dillon had had time to start exploring on her own account. But that meant inevitable disgrace for the Morcove girl who had taken part in all the trickery and scheming.

In other words, Amy was now in this terrible quandary. She did not want Mrs. Dillon to have a chance of finding the treasure. Yet she did not want to fetch in the police, for it would mean a black blot on the fair name of that fine school to which unhappy Cora Grandways belonged.

What, then, was she to do?

Furiously she racked her brains, and not in vain. Of a sudden, she very nearly clapped her hands with delight as an idea flashed upon her.

"That's it—splendid! I can manage that way, and so here goes!"

Muttering thus in her intense excitement, she instantly started to squeeze through the aperture from which the bars had been removed. Another minute, and she was in the open air, ready to let go and drop to the ground below.

Drop she did, after holding her breath for a few seconds. Down she went, landing with a soft thud on her feet. And now she could, if she wished, have scrambled up and pelted off across the moonlit countryside to find the police. But Amy had a better plan than that, as her next lightning actions showed.

All's Well, Unless—!

FOR one brief moment Amy stood and listened, to make sure that all was as quiet as it should be, both here in the open air, and also inside the house.

Convinced that it was safe for her to do so, she then began to prow! round the house walls, looking out for a means of making an entry into the place.

Strange it was, that within a minute of her escape from the house, she should be thinking of re-entering it!

But there was simply no alternative. Her daring scheme was the only possible solution to the problem which had confronted her.

The great old house—how familiar every bit of it was to her, inside and out! In the old, happy days, before her kind master and mistress went abroad, how often had she come to one of these French windows, whilst dusting a room, to stand and gaze dreamily at the sunlit garden. And ah, what a different place the Dillons, by their brief tenancy, had seemed to make of it. Now the lonely mansion seemed to be so gloomy, forbidding, sinister, as if they had infected it with their own base natures.

Very stealthily Amy came round at last to the back premises, and here she at once gave her eager gaze to a small scullery window.

Much as she disliked the idea of forcing an entry, she knew she was absolutely in the right over what she was contemplating. After what she had gone through—and all out of loyalty to her former master and mistress—she was fully entitled to take the liberty of breaking a small pane of glass and then letting herself in at the

ANSWERS
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window. She still considered herself as in the employ of the Langrishes, and called upon to do her best for them.

But could the pane of glass be broken out, without making a noise? That was her great concern.

In the end she took her chance. A bit of sacking was lying about in the yard. This she rolled into a pad, placing it against the window-pane. Then she pressed hard and sharply, hoping to crack the glass without splintering it noisily.

For a time it seemed as if she never would break the glass without causing an appalling tinkle of fragments; but at last, to her great joy, she heard it go with a gentle crack!

That was the only sound. Not a single piece of glass had fallen out, and it was easy for her to coax a few pieces out, without making any noise.

That done, she had only to reach in a hand

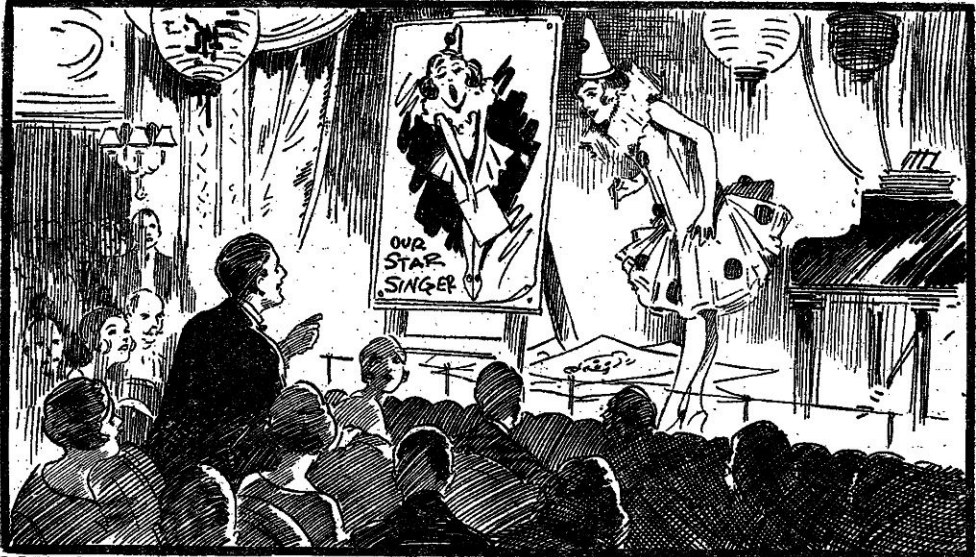
away she stole again. If only to give Mrs. Dillon and the others the surprise of their lives, she closed the door behind her, and locked it.

Down the side staircase she crept, and was soon back at the scullery window. As she clambered through it, she was imagining how the Dillons and Cora Grandways would think her escape had been effected. Someone must have broken in to set her free!

"And that will scare them out of their lives," she almost chuckled to herself, as she started to run off in the moonlight. "They will surely imagine that it is terribly risky for them to stay an hour longer in the house—all the better for me, and Mr. and Mrs. Langrish!"

The despairing prisoner of a few hours ago was in sprightly mood now. She felt she wanted to dance her way over the nightbound countryside.

Free—free! And freedom had been achieved



SOMEONE WANTS PAULA!

Just as the laughter and applause was dying away, a gentleman in the stalls called out: "May I buy that sketch, please, to help the hospital fund?" There was a sensation amongst Betty & Co. Here was a new source of revenue!

and move back the fastener, and the entire little window frame was wide open!

Amy scrambled through, and then—away she nipped, making with that cautious speed for the side staircase and up flight after flight to the top of the house.

Hark, though! Someone stirring?

No, it was only her fancy, born of dreadful apprehension. On again she tip-toed, and suddenly she was outside the door of the very room which had been her prison!

The key was in the lock, as she had felt sure it would be. She turned it back, sent the door softly open, and stole inside.

In a flash she was on her knees at the fireplace, carefully replacing the fragments of hearthstone, so that none of the unlawful tenants of the house, when they came to this room in the morning, would see anything of a tell-tale nature at the fireplace.

They were to find the bird flown. They were never to find out by what secret means she had got away!

In a minute the cautious task was done, and

without any clue being left behind, in the house, to reveal that secret passage to Mrs. Dillon!

It was splendid—wonderful. It meant that she could now take her time about finding the school-girl pierrettes, and certainly need not trouble the police.

But hours of darkness were still before her, and she had not gone far before she felt the wisdom of finding somewhere to lie down and sleep. A haystack soon offered a snug resting place. It was one that had been partly used, and soon she was coiled up, under the stars, with a nice covering of warm hay drawn over her body and limbs, as "comfy" as any bed could have made her.

Stout-hearted, dauntless little Amy! She deserved the sound sleep that was hers that night, if ever a girl did!

But as soon as the sun was up she awoke, with a rosebud freshness in her cheeks. Having laved her hands and face at a little brook, she at once trudged on quite gaily, making for Sandmouth.

Luckily, she had some money upon her—more than enough for her needs, she was sure. For

she knew enough of the schoolgirl pierrettes' plans to feel confident they were at a seaside town not very many miles away.

Eight o'clock found her at Sandmouth Junction, taking a ticket for Endcliffe. The girls would have moved on from the latter place by now, but at Endcliffe she could easily inquire where they were at present performing.

What with a good breakfast and a proper wash and tidy-up, Amy showed few signs of the adventurous time she had had, as she passed through on to the platform. The train was not in, and she strolled to the bookstall, where the morning placards had been put out. One placard bore the sensational announcement:

BRIGHTWELL PIER ABLAZE
Extraordinary Scenes.

But she could not feel very interested even in this thrilling bit of news, her mind still running on affairs at the Grange—the wonderful escape she had made, and the chance there was of finding the treasure somewhere in that secret passage.

What columns of exciting news that would be for the papers, if she, Amy Ashdown, with her Morcove friends, did in the end make the discovery of some hidden treasure!

Then, suddenly, her eyes seemed to fly to the headlines of a daily paper set to the front of the bookstall. The biggest headline announced the burning of Brightwell Pier, and underneath there was more big print, to this effect:

**Schoolgirl Pierrettes Have Thrilling
Escape!**

Amy gave a little cry of excitement.

Her schoolgirl chums, then, were at Brightwell! Here was news indeed—saving her all the vexing delay that tracking them from town to town would have meant.

**PACKED WITH JOYS
FOR GIRLS and BOYS!**



Every page of the jolly COLOURED picture and story paper, SUNBEAM, sparkles over with light hearted fun. It is ideal for little children. In addition to the scores of funny pictures and jokes there are many enthralling fairy and adventure stories which the kiddies will love. Buy the SUNBEAM every Tuesday and watch the smiles grow.

SUNBEAM
2d

Every Tuesday.

Buy a Copy TO-DAY.

She bought a paper and read the full account of the fire, giving a sigh of intense relief when she saw that neither the girls nor anyone else had been hurt. Whilst she was still reading, the train came in, and suddenly she heard a porter calling to her, as he held open a third class door:

"Here you are, miss—Endcliffe, you said?"

"Yes, but—it must be Brightwell now. My friends are there. I—"

"Get in, miss; this goes on to Brightwell."

"My ticket, though—"

"Pay excess at the other end; that'll be all right!"

So she bundled in, finding herself in an otherwise deserted compartment. The whistle blew, the train moved off, and she sat wreathed in smiles, realising that she was actually on the way to Betty & Co.

In a couple of hours, now, she should be with them again, telling the amazing story of her imprisonment and escape.

"Ten past eight, and so I wonder if the Dillons and Cora Grandways are about yet, at the Grange?" she murmured serenely to herself, as she glimpsed the time by a platform-clock. "Oh, the surprise it is going to be to them, when they find me gone! They will never guess—"

Stay, though! What was this sudden awful thought that had burst upon her, fetching her heart into her mouth.

That gridded opening in the wall, by which she had escaped from the house, after traversing the secret passage—supposing one of them noticed it this morning, and noticed that the old iron bars were broken away!

It was a thought that left Amy almost swooning with dismay.

"There was a little ivy growing about it," she remembered agitatedly, "and perhaps that may hide it. If not—oh, it will tell them everything! They'll find out the secret passage after all, and so they'll search and search until they find the treasure! Unless—"

No wonder she suddenly looked out of the carriage window, anxious to see the train gather speed.

If the Dillons found out about the secret passage, after all, they would search for and find the treasure if it was there, unless—unless she and her schoolgirl chums got back to the Grange in time!

Would the broken bars be noticed?

Somehow, it seemed to the dismayed girl that such a thing was inevitable, unless she and her Morcove friends turned up at the Grange before many hours were out.

Go back alone she dare not. Go to the police she was resolved not to do, because Cora Grandways was allied with the schemers.

No! This journey to Brightwell must be made, and she must hope and pray that no fatal hindrance would occur, but that she would find the schoolgirl pierrettes at once—tell them what a desperate crisis it was—and then coming racing back with them, to forestall those thieving wretches after all!

(END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.)

So the burning of Brightwell pier, although a catastrophe, has resulted in Amy getting upon the track of Betty Barton & Co. without undue delay! But will she be able to return with them in time—or will the Dillons discover the secret passage? Next week's splendid complete tale is crowded with thrilling incidents, and you must not miss it on any account. It is entitled: "The Treasure at the Grange!" by Marjorie Stanton.