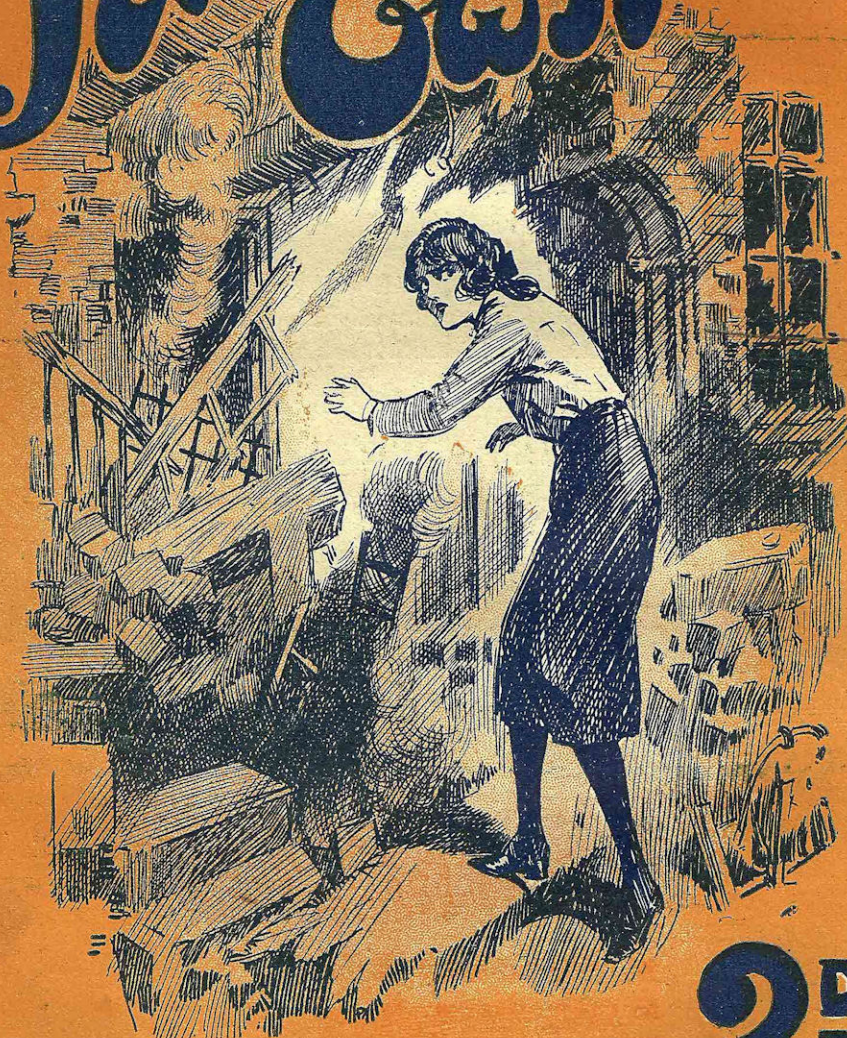


IN THIS ISSUE: "The Secret of the Old Priory!" A SPLendid STORY OF THE GIRLS OF MORCOVE SCHOOL.

The Schoolgirls' Own



MYRA MARSHALL'S QUEST!

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

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Morcove School is burnt out, but you will see that the Morcove tradition is maintained in the temporary quarters.



THE SECRET OF THE OLD PRIORY!

A magnificent long complete story of the girls of Morcove School which tells of Myra Marshall, a prefect, and the mystery that surrounds her.

By **MARJORIE STANTON.**

Paula Has a Bath.

"HOW did you sleep, Polly?"

"Oh, topping!"

"And you, Paula?"

"Bai Jove—wipping!"

"I must have been asleep in two minutes," Madge Minden remarked, as Betty Barton gave that girl an inquiring glance.

"Same here," said Tess Trelawney. "And if everybody feels as fresh as I do this morning, we are all right."

"Quite all wight," was Paula Creel's amiable rejoinder. "Howevah, geals, I pwesume one can get a bath before bwekker?"

Her chums looked amused.

They were all as fond of elaborate ablutions every morning as was the aristocratic Paula. But the girls were no longer beneath the roof of Morcove School, with every facility for morning plunges.

To-day Morcove School was almost a mere shell of brick and mortar, after the big fire that had raged two nights ago. The unhoused scholars had been quartered out in various large houses available for the purpose, and it had fallen to the Fourth and Fifth Forms to take up their abode at a very old mansion indeed.

It was a place called the Old Priory, lying in a wooded hollow about two miles from the school. A real gem of architecture of bygone times, without doubt; but as regards up-to-date bath-rooms, the girls had yet to find out how they stood.

"Take a towel and a cake of soap and explore, Paula darling," advised fun-loving Polly Linton.

"No, thanks!"

"Duffer, why not?" teased Polly. "But perhaps you are thinking of the solemn warning that horrid prefect gave us last night? My word, wasn't she in a rage, that Myra Marshall, when she found us groping about in the dark?"

"Yes, wather! Howevah—"

"I say again," sighed Betty Barton, "it is hard luck for all of us that we got Myra as a prefect when we were packed off here. But we are not going to let her nagging worry us!"

"No jolly fear!" agreed Polly. "So, run along, Paula—"

"My dear Polly, I would be extremely glad to wun if I knew wheah to wun to. Howevah, as the bathrooms—"

"If there are any," chuckled Tess.

"Yes, wather! If there are any, they may be extremely awkward to find, bai Jove!" said Paula. "And I had enough of prowling along howwid cowedidors last night, and going wround to the wight and then wround to the left, and getting altogethah distwessed, bai Jove!"

"Then you'll have to do the same as us—make shift!" laughed Betty, slipping across to a wash-stand. "It's all right, girls—no school this morning. We shall have the hang of the place explained to us, and then we'll know how we stand."

"Howevah—" Paula said dubiously.

In her costly dressing-gown, she still yearned for a morning splash, as a preliminary to what would be, no doubt, a most elaborate toilette.

"Geals," she said at last, drifting to the door, towel in hand, "I wather fancy I will make the expwiment, after all."

"Right-ho!"

"Wather a feathah in one's cap, bai Jove, to be the first geal to twy the baths!"

"If, as Tess remarked, just now, there are any," grinned Polly. "Look sharp, anyhow, Paula, because I can smell eggs and bacon for bwekker. Hurrah!"

"Yes," said Madge Minden, after Paula had vanished, "we are to finish our term's schooling under rather quaint conditions, it seems. But there is one thing—Miss Somerfield means us to be looked after just as well as ever."

"And I happen to know we have got the best of the school cooks," said Betty. "Miss Redgrave told me that old Martha was to be in charge of the kitchen."

"We are all right—spiffing," declared Polly, as they all hurried on with their toilettes. "If it were not for Myra Marshall being here as prefect to keep us out of mischief. Why ever that girl asked to come with us, beats me!"

"You know what she told Miss Somerfield," said Tess. "She thinks of going in for the scholastic profession, and so wants to gain experience."

"Feeble," grimaced Polly sceptically. "My belief is she asked to come with us because she fancied the Old Priory better than the other places. Howevah, as Paula would say—Why, hark! Surely that is Paula!"

The four girls stood stock still, listening in amazement.

Then the room door flew open, and there stood Paula in her dressing-gown, dripping from head to foot!

"Oh, dear!" cried Polly, ready to explode with laughter,

"Geals—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Fwain fwain fwom gwinning, geals! It is nothing to laugh at, bai Jove!"

But all four peaked louder than ever:

"Ha, ha, ha! He, he, he!"

"So you got a plunge, after all!" chuckled Polly.

"Plunge, bai Jove! Yes, wather!" wailed poor Paula. "I was vewy nearly d'wounded!"

"Poor dear!"

"How fwivolous you are, this morning! Look at me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dwrenched fwom head to foot! My dwessing-gown practically wuined!" Paula cried, lifting up her voice. "It's dweadful!"

"But how—"

"Ah, that's what I wish to know, bai Jove!" went on the sopping girl solemnly. "Geals, it's a mystewy! I meahly wound my way along a few cowwidors and up a few stairs, and I came to a gwreat woom with a tank in it."

"The bathroom, of course," said Polly. "Old-fashioned, like all the rest of the place."

"It is a woom I do not wish to ve-visit," declared Paula. "Theah was I, standing and looking at the tank, bai Jove, just inside the doorway, when— Geals, I went in, head first!"

"Oh!"

"A most distwessing expwience, I assure you," said Paula. "And nothing to gwinn about!"

"He, he, he!"

"I have a stwong impwession I was pushed fwom behind, don't you know?"

"Pushed?"

"Yes, wather. Pwecious hard, too. Howevah, I fwain fwom further comment," sighed the bedraggled girl, starting to shiver in her sopping gown. "I pwefer to pwoceed with my toilette."

Five minutes later, however, she suddenly asked Polly:

"Polly deah, I twust you will not mind my inqwiring. Did you follow me along those cowwidors—"

"And push you in the tank?"

"Yes, wather. Because if you did, Polly deah, it was most fwivolous of you, bai Jove! Extremely aggwawating!"

Polly called the others to witness that she had not been out of the room, and so Paula's escapade might have remained quite a baffling mystery if one explanation had not been only too apparent.

"Those Fifth Form girls—Ellen Mansfield and Co.!" Betty suddenly exclaimed. "We know they are in a state of feud with us. Paula darling—"

"Bai Jove!"

"All right!" burst out Polly grimly. "We'll get to the bottom of this. And if Ellen Mansfield did give you that gentle push, Paula—"

"Gentle, bai Jove! Howevah, it is quite all wight; don't you geals twouble!" said Paula affably. "I will have a word with Ellen myself."

Betty and the others made no comment on this, but they had to grin. The idea of Paula—easy-going, polite, inoffensive Paula—having anything like a "word" with a japer, and making that japer repent the joke, was too amusing.

In a few minutes they all answered the call

to brekker, and amidst the excitement of sitting down to the first proper meal in the Priory's great old dining-room, even Paula seemed to forget all about her morning plunge.

There were two tables, one for each Form. Miss Massingham, the Fourth Form mistress, was not in evidence, and it was popular Miss Redgrave who took the head of that table, whilst unpopular Myra Marshall sat at the other end.

A different state of things prevailed at the Fifth Form table. There the Form-mistress was presiding, with the assistant-mistress to help her. Only one prefect, in fact, had come to the Priory—the girl Myra Marshall, and her duties would have to do almost entirely with the Fourth Form, worse luck! as Betty and Co. were feeling. "By the way," Miss Redgrave remarked happily, towards the end of the meal, "the lorry has brought over a lot more salvaged stuff from the school that will be useful here. And a few of the bikes have been brought along."

"Oh, good!" was the delighted chorus.

"I shall have to get a couple of you girls to run into the town for me, by and by," Miss Redgrave went on. "We have just this one day for getting to rights; then—school!"

This time the general comment was a sort of "Um!"

The talk became general again, but just as the girls were being given the signal to dismiss, Myra Marshall called up the table to the mistress:

"Miss Redgrave, perhaps I had better remind you to give that warning to the girls. You know—"

"Oh, yes!"

Miss Redgrave was suddenly serious, but not, however, stern.

"Just a word, girls!" she said, with none of the ill-natured hardness that Myra's face was expressing. "This old Priory being a very ramshackle place, ever so much too big for us, it is advisable for you to keep in the main to one part."

Myra said quickly:

"Better tell them it is all out of bounds, except—"

"Oh, I don't think it advisable to take upon myself to make any hard and fast rule," broke in Miss Redgrave gently. "As I pointed out to Miss Massingham when we were discussing the matter yesterday evening, it will be very hard to define exactly what part of the place is out of bounds."

"The west wing—" Myra suggested.

"The west wing is connected in many ways with the house proper," answered the assistant-mistress. "No, Myra; I don't think any fixed rule is practicable or necessary. We will just trust the girls for the present, at least."

"Thank you, Miss Redgrave!" went up the pleased murmurs. "We shall try not to cause trouble."

"In fact, Miss Wedgway," chimed in Paula's polite drawl, "it is extremely impwobable we shall want to do much more expwying. I tried to get a bath this morning. Howevah—"

"Didn't you get one?" Ellen Mansfield looked round from the other table to call, in a chuckling tone: "Some of us thought we heard a splash!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Did you weahly, bai Jove!"

Paula said no more then. There was too much laughter. But when the dismiss had been given, she very politely strolled up to Ellen Mansfield,

when that girl was standing in the great hall, surrounded by several Fifth Form cronies.

"There appears to be a great deal of merriment at my expense," said Paula.

"Yes, wather!" Ellen mocked, causing a yell of laughter.

"It is provable," suggested Paula, as sweet-tempered as ever, "you were instrumental in causing me to fall in the water, Ellen!"

"Did you see me?" grinned Ellen.

"I wegwet I did not," was the answer. "I realise, howevah, that some geal followed me to a bathroom——"

"Bathroom! Ha, ha, ha!" exploded Ellen.

"Duffer, that was not a bathroom at all!"

"Bai Jove!"

"It was a tank that supplies the house——"

"Oh!"

Paula's bland astonishment was so comical that even Betty and other Fourth Form girls were starting to laugh, when Myra Marshall made one of her sudden descents upon the whole mirthful crowd.

"Now, you Fifth Form girls, don't idle about like this!" she exclaimed irritably. "Betty, and all the rest of the Fourth—you are to come with me."

And for the next half-hour she kept them all about her, taking upon herself to explain exactly where they might go and where they must not.

Betty and Co. felt furious. After the way Miss Redgrave had spoken at breakfast time, and the latitude which she and Miss Massingham seemed inclined to grant the scholars, it was very exasperating to have the unpopular prefect going behind the mistresses' backs like this.

The last thing the girls wanted to do, however, was to have any scene with the officious prefect. Conditions were abnormal and trying, and it seemed hardly sporting to add to the mistresses' difficulties by having a "bust up" with Myra. If she went on like this, however—well, she would have to be taken down a peg or two, somehow!

But what was the vague idea that was beginning to form itself in the mind of one Fourth Form scholar, at least, in regard to Myra Marshall?

It was nothing else than the notion—the strange suspicion, call it—that mere officiousness was not at the root of Myra's anxiety to keep the girls from roaming the place as they pleased.

Betty Barton was the girl who had suddenly begun to entertain this belief. She was saying nothing to her chums about it at present, but she was putting two and two together, and altogether she reckoned that the suspicion was justified.

And only by the merest fluke did Betty miss a very startling discovery before that day was over!

Myra's Strange Friends.

SOON after tea that afternoon Myra Marshall left the great old house by a side door and made her way through the wooded grounds to a certain lodge that stood just inside the main gateway.

She was alone.

All day she had hardly let Betty and the other girls out of her sight for a minute, but it had been possible for her to leave them at last. Every scholar in the place had been put under orders to write home after tea, and the girls were now scribbling away most enthusiastically in their makeshift classrooms.

Myra's trip down to the lodge was made in secretive fashion, and that would have surprised Betty and Co. if they had known about it. For, at this same lodge, there were staying a lady and gentleman with whom all the girls were on the best of terms.

The couple were a Mr. Michael Carnay and his very beautiful wife. It was understood that they had no interest in the Priory, but had merely rented the small lodge, ready furnished, for the sake of enjoying a few months of absolute country repose and fine air.

Why, then, did Myra Marshall approach the lodge at this moment by a roundabout way through the wooded ground? Why did she slip in through an arched gateway of the back garden wall, and then make a darting rush for the kitchen door?



PAULA'S BATH! There stood Paula in her dressing-gown, dripping from head to foot. "Ha, ha, ha!" pealed the girls. "It's nothing to laugh at, bai Jove!" remonstrated Paula.

Myra's first words gave the answer to these posers when she was inside the lodge parlour—words that showed she had not met Mr. and Mrs. Carnay, as the other girls had, for the first time yesterday!

"Well, how goes it?" she asked breathlessly, looking from one to the other of the couple who had the lodge to themselves, for no maid was kept. "I slipped down to see you whilst there was a chance."

"That's right, my dear," said Mrs. Carnay, from where she sat at the small tea-table. "Will you have a cup? We are rather late to-day."

"Thanks, no; I had my tea with the others," declined Myra. "Now they are all writing letters to their people, so I needn't fidget. But I have had a day of it, I tell you!"

"And we have been thinking about you—"

rather pitying you all the time," remarked the middle-aged, grey-haired gentleman who was Mr. Carnay. He appealed to his beautiful wife—a stately woman, lavishly dressed, and much younger than he—in a very courteous manner.

"Jean darling, I am sure the girl will have a cup—"

"No," Myra declined a second time firmly. "I don't think I ought to stop more than two minutes. Oh, it is going to be awful," she exclaimed in the next breath, "living in constant dread of everything being discovered, dreading to be seen talking with you, and yet all of a fidget until one does get a word or two!"

Michael Carnay scrutinised the girl closely.

"Your nerves are bad, Myra?"

"They are," she owned, with a sigh. "I didn't sleep a wink last night. I feel the strain is going to be too much for me."

"Nonsense, my dear!" said beautiful Mrs. Carnay, in her silken voice. "My husband and I have talked it over thoroughly, and we really don't see why a parcel of schoolgirls should bring about any crash. It is most unfortunate, their coming here, of course, but—"

"You don't know what they are like, some of them," Myra struck in gloomily. "There is a sort of romance about their being here, which they are going to revel in. They are longing to explore the whole place."

"Well, and if they do," said Michael Carnay, sitting back from the tea-table and feeling for his cigarette-case, "is it so certain that they will find out the secret? My wife and I think not."

In his engaging way he offered the lady a cigarette, and she took it. When it was lighted, she got up and took a turn about the room, puffing little clouds of smoke with evident enjoyment.

Suddenly she stood still, except that she made a little impressive gesture at Myra with the hand that held the cigarette.

"You are in with us, Myra—you know perfectly well why," she said, with a sort of cold dignity that accentuated her queenly air. "You will do your best—"

"Didn't I do my best directly I heard that the girls were coming here?" Myra protested, rather sullenly. "I got myself appointed prefect so as to keep my eye upon the girls."

"That is admitted; you have done splendidly so far," the woman said, in a softened tone. "And neither my husband nor I are going to forget that, after all, you are still a schoolgirl. We are not going to expect the impossible of you. We merely say—keep your nerve!"

"That's it, you know," nodded Michael Carnay. "See what a wonderful nerve my wife has! Able to look all the world steadily in the eye, for all she spends many a night helping me with the—the work!"

Myra heaved up her shoulders, as if she were rallying her failing spirits.

"I know," she said softly. "You are both wonderful! Well, I shall feel easier in my mind, perhaps, after a day or two. There's one upset, though, that I had yesterday, and I haven't got over it yet. One I haven't told you about."

"Oh!"

Man and wife paused in their cigarette-smoking, looking slightly disconcerted.

"It is a sickening nuisance," said Myra miserably, "but my study at the school was not burnt out during the fire, and yet I am not allowed to go to it now. Of course, it was badly

damaged by smoke and water, like every other room in the building, but it was not burnt out."

Michael Carnay flicked the ash from his cigarette.

"You mean——" he said, and paused.

"Yes, There was a small box of—of the articles in my study at the time of the fire," faltered Myra. "That box is still there, and it may be found and opened by some thieving salvager!"

"Ah, yes!"

Again the husband and wife looked rather as if their boasted nerves were receiving a severe shaking.

"That's bad!" muttered Michael Carnay. "No mistake about it, if the contents of that box should be discovered."

"But if the study was not burnt out, why didn't you get to it after the fire next day?" Jean Carnay asked.

"I couldn't!" was the girl's rueful admission. "I did my best, but the fireman on duty at the door would not let me enter the house. All I can do is——"

"Try again!" the woman took her up, with a slow nod. "Yes, that is certainly what you must do, Myra. Or, if you could tell me how to find the study, I myself would go, after dark. I would enter that building somehow!"

"It's quite impossible for me to tell you which room is mine, out of the dozens there are," exclaimed the girl. "No. I see quite well it means that and nothing else. A secret visit to the school after dark; the fireman may be off duty then. In any case, I must elude him, and then——"

"Sh! Myra, stand back—back there in the corner!" came the sudden urgent whisper from Michael Carnay.

He had drifted close to the front window during his thoughtful pacing about the room, and suddenly he had seen a young schoolgirl speeding towards the front porch.

The girl was looking towards the window as she came towards the house, and well might Michael Carnay fear that Myra would be seen. For there were windows at either end of the parlour, enabling anybody outside to see right through, and, of course, see all within the room.

With a suppressed gasp of dismay, Myra shrank close to the corner to which she had been waded. She understood the sudden danger there was of her being seen. Her dilating eyes, peering towards the front window and past it, saw the girl who was coming.

Betty Barton!

"One of your girls—eh?" guessed Mrs. Carnay, who had already dropped her cigarette into a teacup.

"One of the very sharpest!" whispered back the prefect. "Be very careful! Oh, why has she come here? Can she have watched me slip down to this house? But I left her writing letters!"

The agitated girl was looking about her in a hunted way. Impossible to slip out of the room! Yet was it good enough merely to stand shrinking in the dimmest corner?

Jean Carnay now showed what her nerve was in any crisis. Quite calmly she signed to the trembling girl to hide—under the table!

Down dropped Myra upon all fours, and under the table she scrambled, the cloth almost completely concealing her. And then, whilst Michael Carnay resumed his pacing to and fro, as if he

were merely enjoying an after-tea smoke, his wife went out to the porch.

"Yes, dear?" she purred in her charming way, smiling upon breathless Betty Barton.

"If you please, Mrs. Carnay," said that girl, "one of the mistresses told me to run and see if you had anything for the post, because I and some of my chums are to cycle with the school letters to the post-office."

"Why, that is very nice of you!" exclaimed Mrs. Carnay. "And please thank the mistress very much from me. Michael, any letters for the post?" she called airily to her husband.

"Letters? No, thanks!" he answered, sauntering out to the porch. "But if you are going to Fern Grove post-office, young lady, I wonder if you would mind getting me a five-shilling postal-order?"

"With pleasure, sir," said Betty, and so he handed her a couple of half-crowns and coppers for the commission.

Then the Form captain sped off back to the mansion, little dreaming how she had just missed making that strange discovery. By the merest fluke, indeed, she had failed to see Myra Marshall standing inside the lodge parlour, just a moment before Michael Carnay gave the warning.

If she had caught the startling glimpse of the prefect—well, it is safe to say that Betty Barton would have divined something that would have accounted for Myra's uneasy conduct.

As it was, many a strange adventure was to befall Betty Barton and her chums before the one amazing fact was revealed to them all—the fact that Myra Marshall, their unpopular prefect, only a schoolgirl though she was, had been in league with Mr. and Mrs. Carnay for many a day ere this!

What is Myra Up To ?

"DON'T let me forget," said Betty, as she and her chums were cycling along the half-mile of woodland road to the village of Fern Grove, "Mr. Carnay gave me the money to get a five-shilling postal-order."

"I'll remind you," laughed Polly, "if you'll remind me to get some chocs. at the tuck-shop!"

"I can see you needing to be reminded about that," came from Tess Trelawney. "But is there a tuckshop? My recollection of Fern Grove is that it is only a cluster of thatched cottages in the heart of the valley."

"Well, we shall be there in a jiffy," said Madge. "Then we shall see!"

"Yes, wather! And meanwhile, geals," pleaded Paula Creel, "is there any pwekking need for this gweat wush? You must wealise, geals, a geal can hardly keep her hat on stwaight if she has to wush."

Whereupon Polly was seized with one of her mischievous ideas.

She slowed down her cycle to get close alongside Paula, then invited that guileless girl to take her by one shoulder.

"That will steady you, Paula darling."

"Oh, thanks!" beamed Paula, and she looked quite happy proceeding in this fashion until it suddenly dawned upon her that Polly was putting on speed.

"Are you quite all right, Paula darling?"

"Quite all wight, thanks! Howevah— Bai Jove!"

"Hold on!"

"Yes, wather. I—I don't think I could leave

go now, Polly darling! So, would you kindly wefwain fwom pweceeding with quite such a wush? A wush, Polly, is so—so— Oh, gwacious!"

"Hold tight, duffer!"

"Pup—pup—Polly dud—deah!"

"We want to startle the natives!" was Polly's mirthful cry, as they all five rounded a bend and came in sight of the woodland hamlet.

"Faster, then—faster!"

Paula wanted to say how frivolous her chum was, but she couldn't. She was too agitated.

Faster and faster Polly was towing the aristocrat along, and that young lady durst not let go her hold of the madcap's shoulder.

The result was a sort of sudden acrobatic display by Paula Creel just outside the village post-office.

"Bai Jove!" gasped the victim of Polly's latest spree, as she landed by a miracle on her feet. "I—I do wish you would wefwain, Polly deah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"These hat-waiving expweiences are so wudiculous, don't you know! Just when I wanted to keep my hat stwaight!"

The hat was bashed over Paula's left eye at present, and so it was no wonder that a great peal of laughter went up from all the other girls, causing a few shy village children to rush indoors, quite scared.

"Theah, you see!" complained poor Paula. "You have fwightened ewewyboddy! Howevah, you always were a fwial, Polly deah."

Polly, by now, was looking in at the post-office window. Amongst faded bills about foreign mails and other postal information, there were some jars of old-fashioned sweets.

"Paula darling, you are a good girl. I'll treat you!"

"Oh, thanks—"

"Some brandyballs—"

"Gweat goodness—bwandyballs!"

"Or coconut toffee—nice hard toffee to crunch."

"Polly," groaned Paula, squirming. "When you talk of cwunching toffee, I—I— Weally, I would wather not be tweated like that. I would wather be tweated with a little more wespsect, bai Jove! Yes, wathier!"

"Well, I wonder what they have inside," said Polly, following Betty, Tess and Madge to the door.

Betty had pushed open the door, thus setting a hanging bell jangling, and in a moment a dear old village dame came from her room at the back to attend to this sudden sensational influx of customers.

"Business first," said Betty, and she asked for the five-shilling postal-order, whilst her chums took stock of the sweets set out in glass jars upon the counter.

Like the sweets in the window, they were not calculated to create excitement.

"Well, I'm going to bust a few shillings somehow!" Polly said desperately. "I know it was my turn to stand treat. If I get a pound of almond hardbake, will you girls help me eat it?"

The response was hardly enthusiastic, and so Polly drew attention to other sweets. "Cough candy, pear drops, or what about a whole pound of liquorice?"

"Extwemely kind of you, Polly, Howevah—"

"Monkey nuts, then?"

"How fwivolous you are, Polly! Isn't she, geals?"

"Then," said Polly, "we come down to locust beans!"



AN UNPLEASANT SURPRISE!

"Excuse me, miss," the shopkeeper said gently. "One of the half-crowns you gave me is bad."
"Bad!" echoed Betty. "Good gracious!"

In a smothered way, Paula and Tess said "Ugh!" Madge laughed.

"Here, Betty," sighed Polly, as her bosom chum turned away from the postal counter, having finished the business there, "do tell a girl what she can buy that will be a treat! I wonder—"

"Excuse me, miss," the old dame suddenly broke in gently, calling to Betty. "One of the half-crowns you gave me for the postal-order is bad."

"Bad!" echoed Betty, "Good gracious!"
"Bai Jove!"

All five girls looked equally shocked.

"Oh, that's all right, my dears," the good woman smiled consolingly; "it isn't your fault, of course."

"But—but—"

"You didn't know it was bad?"

"No; but," Betty exclaimed, still looking upset, "it is the sort of thing one doesn't like to happen!"

"Is it one of the coins Mr. Carnay gave you?" questioned Madge.

"Yes," said the Form captain. "Of course, he didn't know it was bad, either. That is the worst of bad money; it goes from one innocent person to another," and then all at once somebody spots it."

She opened her purse and took out another half-crown.

"Is that one bad?" she asked, with a laugh, handing it to the postmistress.

That good soul took the fresh coin and examined it critically.

"Why, I'm afraid it is!"

"What!"

"A wrong 'un, my dear—yes," declared the woman. "No doubt about it. A new coin, and yet the edge is so poor."

"Weal, bai Jove!" gasped Paula, whilst the other girls simply stared, astounded.

"Where did you get that one from, Betty?" asked Madge, at last.

"Goodness knows!" shrugged Betty. "Not from Mr. Carnay, anyhow, I kept his two coins separate from my own."

"There never is no telling," sympathised the postmistress. "One gets 'em anywhere and anyhow. I shouldn't have known 'em, only I've heard as how there are a great lot going about over at Barncombe."

Betty gravely took back both bad coins and put them apart from her other money. Then she said what was still due to the postmistress by means of a ten-shilling note, and the unpleasant incident was dropped.

"We wanted to take back a few things," Polly now said, fingering a ten-shilling note of her own. "Not sweets—no. Something that will be a nice snack between meals, you know."

The postmistress suggested "heggs."

"No; eggs are all right for brekker."

"Quite all wight," put in Paula. "How-
evah—"

"Happles?" suggested the old dame. "Horanges?"

"Have you oranges?" cried Polly, in sudden delight. "Oh, I didn't see any! In this box, are they?" she added, whipping off the loose lid.

But that box was full of "horions," and the postmistress had to go into the backyard to broach a case of oranges that the local carrier had only brought in that day, and then it took her about five minutes to put up the two dozen that Polly purchased in an old soda bag.

Great fun the Morecove madcap had with those oranges during the ride home!

Her chums warned her, since she would persist in carrying them all herself, to be careful. But in a minute one fell out—plop!—and then another, and another, and then Polly asked Paula very sweetly if she would mind dismounting to pick them up?

"You see, you are riding last," Polly cried back gaily.

"Yes, wather!" suggested Paula, quite cheerfully.

But, as fast as Paula floundered along, wheeling her machine with one hand and picking up oranges with the other, more oranges fell. Paula, the soul of good nature, strove valiantly to keep up with the demand upon her energies. She never suspected any joke, until Polly suddenly fell off her machine, spitting with laughter.

Meanwhile, Betty rather missed this bit of fun by riding ahead to call at the lodge and hand over the five-shilling postal-order.

Nearing the lodge, Betty dismounted, wheeled her machine into the grounds, and propped it against a bit of old railings. Beautiful Mrs. Carnay was taking a graceful turn upon the garden path, and that lady smiled very sweetly upon Betty.

"Isn't it a perfect evening for the time of the year? And do you hear the robins singing so-o-o sweetly?" gushed Mrs. Carnay.

"Yes; and here is the five-shilling order for Mr. Carnay, please," said Betty, in a practical manner.

"Oh, thank you so much, my dear! Will you come in?"

"My chums are just—"

"I quite understand! Well, then, good-night!"

Betty made a rather mechanical response as she turned back to her machine. She was feeling very

embarrassed. Up to the last moment, she had been undecided as to whether she should say anything about the bad half-crown or not.

She was entitled to speak about it, of course. On the other hand, the Carnays would have been entitled to ask whether she was quite, quite sure it had been one of the half-crowns that Mr. Carnay had given her, and not one of her own!

So, preferring to suffer the loss herself rather than go into the whole horrid incident, she had held her peace. But she had felt very awkward whilst she was speaking to the lady; all the more so because Mrs. Carnay had given her such a queer look.

Yes, in spite of the friendly smile and the gushing welcome, beautiful Mrs. Carnay had looked uneasy. The evening light was still strong, and Betty had detected the look quite easily.

"I don't think I like her now," was the feeling that suddenly came over the Form captain, as she got back to her machine. "I began by liking her, but now I don't."

Polly and the rest were coming along, still in great excitement over the tiresome oranges. Betty was usually as ready as any girl to join in others' mirth, but just at present she felt irritated. Not to spoil her chums' spirits, she hurried on again, wheeling her machine. For it was almost impossible to pedal along this rank by-path, the surface of which had gone all to pieces.

Suddenly she checked in a startled manner.

A silvery glint of bright metal, caused by some last shaft of light from the sunset sky, had come to her from the heart of a clump of overgrown laurels. She peered amongst the bushes, and saw—a girl's bicycle!

One of the school cycles, hidden—yes, hidden here!

"And it's Myra Marshall's, too!" was Betty's astonished whisper to herself. "Oh, how strange! That machine has been hidden here by Myra, instead of being put away in the old stable along with all the others. But why—why?"

A minute later Polly, Paula, Madge, and Tess all caught up with Betty, who was waiting for them just a few yards from the laurels.

"Oh, dear, we have had such a spree!" panted Polly. "You should have seen Paula with the oranges! But what's been happening to you, Betty dear, that you look so—flummoxed?"

"Oh, nothing!" Betty thought it best to say at present.

But she was still wondering why—why had Myra Marshall hidden her cycle in those bushes!

Some Fun—and a Good Deal of Mystery.

A FEW minutes after Betty and Co. had shut their bedroom door that night, several girlish figures came creeping into that corridor from another part of the house.

Stiffing their titters, the girls followed their leader half-way along the passage, each holding a pillow at the "ready."

They were Fifth Form scholars, and there is no need to say what their game was!

"One biff all round, then out again," whispered the leader, checking suddenly. "Not Betty's room—no. We'll give them a dose another night! Try this room."

Then, having peered around to see that her companions were quite ready for the onslaught, she suddenly flung the door wide open.

"Go!"

Next moment some four girls of the Fourth Form were catching it hot from "the enemy," being taken completely by surprise.

Biff—whang—biff—blip! went the pillows, the wielders of them almost losing their balance as they let fly at Bluebell Courtney, Trixie Hope, Dolly Delane, and Eva Merrick.

Out went the candles, as the whirling pillows caused a great commotion in the air, and in the darkness confusion became greater than ever.

The invaders thought they would stay and give the invaded a double dose for once; the invaded, meanwhile, set about retaliating.

Amidst gasps for breath and smothered laughter and a great pattering of feet, Bluebell and her friends seized their pillows and returned blow for blow.

Whiff—blip—whizz! Then a crash, as somebody fell all asprawl. That was the Fifth Form leader, but she was on her feet again as soon as she could stop laughing.

"Go for 'em!" she panted.

"Throw them out!" the invaded girls urged each other. "Fourth Form for ever!"

Now Betty and Co.'s room was only next door. Although the particular wall was very solid, some of the commotion reached the chums' ears.

"Hark!" said Betty, all at once.

"Bai Jove!"

"A pillow raid next door!" chuckled Polly, who was just in the act of passing round the bag of oranges. "What a lark!"

Betty nipped to the door and whipped it open. "Yes, come on! Quick, and we can cut off their retreat!"



STEALTHY STEPS! The watching girls saw a vague figure emerge from the jungle of neglected shrubs. "Do you know, I believe it's Myra Marshall!" whispered Betty excitedly.

"How splendid!" chuckled Tess, grabbing a pillow. "All right; I'm ready!"

At that instant the Fifth Form raiding-party were driven from the adjoining room in great disorder.

Whiff—bang—blip!

"Here, who— Oh, it's you!" came in a bewildered gasp from the Fifth Form leader, as she suddenly found Betty pounding away at her with a pillow.

"Yes, it's us!" chuckled Betty.

"Bai Jove, wather!"

"Have an orange?" inquired Polly, hurling one through the darkness, on the chance of clipping the ear of some hapless Fifth-Former.

A dull thud told the madcap that the orange had plumped against the wall. But she was not discouraged.

The oranges had proved rather "dud" ones. They were of the juiceless, collapsed order, suggesting that they had been squeezed for wine. And this, to Polly, seemed a fine way of disposing of them!

"Have another!" she spoke into the darkness, and thump! went another orange as it struck the wall.

"No luck! But—"

"Oooo!"

"Aha, that's better! Got the range now, girls!"

"Yes, wather! However, that was my eah, bai Jove!" came a feeble protest from the scene of darkness and disorder. "Pway be more careful, Polly deah!"

"Ha, ha, ha! She didn't hit us!" one Fifth Form girl chuckled. "She only hit— Oooo!"

"Got you that time, anyhow!" Polly laughed grimly. "Stand clear, girls! I've got any amount still!"

This news just about took the heart out of the Fifth Form raiders. All in a moment they were in full flight, taking their pillows with them.

Polly followed them up. She was still hurling oranges gently along the passage, when a new-comer suddenly appeared upon the scene.

Myra Marshall!

In a flash the raiders were gone past Myra, and were out of sight round a corner.

"St—" began Myra. She was meaning to cry "Stop!" but at that instant a soft orange smote her gently upon the forehead!

Betty and Co. were in for it now, they felt. Their high and mighty prefect had formed a target for Polly's last shot!

What was their surprise, then, when Myra came along to them, in a moment, looking ready to treat the whole thing as a joke!

"I rather got in the way, didn't I?" she said, with a forced laugh. "No, I'm not going to report you—"

"Bai Jove!" was Paula's incredulous gasp, whilst Betty and the others stood astonished. She was not going to report them!

"I know how you girls must get up to larks sometimes," Myra went on, quite nicely. "And I suppose the Fifth Form began it? Only," she added quickly, "if I don't report the whole thing, it must be on one condition!"

"Oh!"

"You must promise me, Betty, on behalf of the whole Form, that there will be no lying awake to-night to make some silly counter-attack on the Fifth Form."

"We had not thought of—"

"You must promise!" she cut Betty short, with a touch of her usual asperity.

"Oh, if you must have a promise—all right, then!" said Betty.

"Pick up all those oranges," Myra now ordered. "Then be quick and get to bed. Remember," she wound up impressively as she turned to go, "school begins in earnest to-morrow!"

What an effort it had cost her to treat the younger girls' "larking about" with good humour was apparent the moment she was alone.

She swept a hand across her forehead, and heaved a great sigh, like one who is sorely driven.

"Why were they fated to come to this house?" she said to herself fiercely. "What peace of mind shall I ever know, with a pack of girls like that about the place?"

Nor had she calmed down by the time every other inmate of the great old priory—mistress, scholars, and servants—were preparing to sleep.

Alone in her bedroom, the girl prefect sat by her open window, brooding heavily.

She had not prepared for bed, but, remaining fully dressed, had blown out her light.

A full moon was shining clearly in the sky to-night, and its radiance flooded into this room of Myra's, revealing the pallor and tension of her looks.

Now and then, as time crept on, she glanced at the illuminated dial of her wrist-watch. Half-past ten; eleven; and so on to half-past that late hour. Still she sat there, and it is certain that the least sound about the house would have made her start up, all on the alert, to listen anxiously.

But no unnerving sound ever came to her ears. All she heard was the occasional hoot of an owl over in the great woods.

So presently she got up very softly from her chair, like one who feels the time has come after a trying ordeal of waiting.

From the top of a tall, corner cupboard she took down a length of rope ladder. One end was provided with a grappling hook, and this she made fast to a strong iron ring which she must have screwed into the floorboard, just under the window, in readiness for to-night.

Then she paid out the rope ladder slowly and carefully, and its other end almost touched the ground at last, twenty feet below.

This done, she stole across to her locked door, and listened more intently than ever.

Not a sound anywhere!

She was reassured. Back went the mysterious girl to her open window, and next minute she was going down the rope—down, down, swinging a little, but without making the least sound.

Then, away from the moonlit house, across the neglected gardens, to where her bicycle was hidden.

As stealthily as possible she dragged it out, and wheeled it along the by-path to the main gateway. The lodge was in darkness; yet its "gentle" tenants were far from being asleep.

For all at once they were with Myra Marshall on the roadway, just outside the gates.

"You have managed it, then?" whispered Mrs. Carnay, as she and her husband stepped softly towards the girl. "We were just wondering—"

"Yes; the rope ladder you gave me worked splendidly. I am going—"

"Then I shall come too," said the woman, drawing a murmur of approval from the man. "I have a machine, and I will ride with you. I don't like your going alone."

"But—"

"Let my wife go with you—as far as the school bounds, at least," put in Michael Carnay softly. "As for me—"

He paused, turning to look towards the great old house.

"I am going to put in an hour or two to-night," he muttered. "Jean, you will know where I am if you find me away from the lodge when you get back."

"Yes, Michael. I suppose it is safe to risk the work when those girls—"

"We must make it safe!" he answered. "It cannot be stopped for them!"

And the next moment he had gone, not towards the house, but back to the lodge, whilst Myra Marshall stood waiting, with a beating heart, for Jean Carnay to get her cycle out of its shed.

The woman was with the girl again at last, and in silence—without lights, either—they rode away, making for Morcove School!

The Midnight Search.

"MRS. CARNAY—"

"Yes?"

"It is only a very little way now!"

Myra Marshall voiced that information in a guarded tone.

For half an hour these two had pedalled along in the brilliant moonlight, and during all that time not a word had passed. Nor was Mrs. Carnay led into very much talk by her companion's remark, now that they were close to the school.

At first, indeed, the woman had said nothing at all, but merely slowed her machine and then alighted.

"Leave that bike with me," she whispered at last tersely. "I had better not come perhaps!"

"No, I am best alone," Myra assented. "Of course, if I see anyone—no matter whom—I must turn back!"

"Yes."

Again the talk lapsed. The couple had dismounted in the bye-lane that skirted one part of the school grounds. Myra had only to force her way through a breach in the hedge to find herself on the outskirts of the old playing field. This she now did, and was at once ready to prowl forward, all alone.

In her dark cloak, and looking stealthily about her at every step, in fear of being seen, cautiously the desperate girl made her way towards the burnt-out schoolhouse.

There it stood, bulking before her against the starry sky, a strange, impressive sight, with the moonlight shining strongly upon its charred walls and its rows of gaping windows.

Ah, and how pathetic a sight, too, as well as impressive, one would have said; surely enough to send a pang of deep sorrow through the breast of any scholar belonging to the grand old school! But it did not seem as if Myra felt any such emotion. Perhaps her agitated mind was too taken up with the critical task that lay before her.

She must have been wondering at every step, was there anybody on guard to-night? Was it possible that all watch upon the ruined premises had been withdrawn, when there was so much about the place to tempt thieves? And yet—

Oh, she had had to come! No rest for her until she had paid a secret visit to the study that used to be hers, and had either recovered the box or satisfied herself that it was destroyed. The box that no official salvagers, no souvenir hunters, no thieving tramp indeed, must ever get hold of!

One thing was in her favour. She knew every inch of the place, inside and out. Avoiding the open field, she was soon stealing along the

shrubby paths, to which she could have found her way almost blindfolded.

The same when she was on the dark side of the ruined schoolhouse. All was in black shadow here, but it made no difference; she knew how to avoid the stone-flagged path, and to choose a cinder path on which her steps were less liable to become audible.

And so, at last, she reached an unsightly gap in the house wall that had once been a doorway.

Unsilently! That was the word for everything indeed. The blackened passages downstairs, all wet with water from the hydrants, the ruined staircase, the woodwork looking more and more charred as she mounted the littered stairs—they were ugly things to see.

Suddenly—it was just as she was turning into the corridor where the Sixth Form had had its studies—she got a bad scare.

Her heart leapt within her as she heard, first a man's low cough, and then his soft whistling, as he began to pace to and fro down below, close to the front entrance.

One guard at least was still on duty. But she had eluded him, thank goodness. Of course, he was taking his vigil easily. He never expected the place to be visited at this time of night. Only what if he started making a formal round of the building just as she was ready to creep away!

On again she stole, along the old familiar passage, now in ruins; and so she came to the old familiar study.

Moonlight was flooding into the room, and now indeed she felt a shudder of horror at the change which the never-to-be-forgotten fire had wrought.

Not that the study had been involved in the fire itself, but the place had been blackened with smoke, washed out by hydrants. The furniture was ruined, tumbled about the room all anyhow. And it had been such a fine room! Even in her great excitement she could not help thinking that.

But the box—where was it? After all, what did all the ruin and wreckage of the fire matter, so long as she found that box?

The disorder in the room hampered her movements. She would have liked to make an excited pounce to where the box used to be kept, but she had to be extra-cautious, now that she knew there was at least one person on guard over the deserted building.

Stealthily, then, she picked her way amongst the litter. By the light of the moon she steered past the table and between overturned chairs, and got to a corner cupboard.

Still locked, thank goodness, just as she had always kept it!

Out came her small bunch of keys, and she fitted the right one into the hole. But the key would not turn, and suddenly her heart thumped with fresh alarm.

Why would the lock not open? Had it been tampered with?

Anxiety became a very frenzy with her. It never occurred to her that the lock might be simply jammed as a result of the fire and the floods of water that had been poured into the burning building.

She wrenched and twisted at the key, and suddenly it broke in the lock!

A sobbing gasp of despair burst from her. Worse than ever, this! In reckless desperation she took the old poker from the fender and began to use it to prise open the door.

At the risk of being heard, she must open the

door! She must know whether the box was still inside the cupboard, or whether the cupboard had been looted!

A final desperate wrench, the sharp crack of a burst hasp, and the door flew open, almost striking her face.

"Ah!" she breathed exultantly.

The box was there.

Crazy with relief, she caught it up and turned to rush away with it. But its contents were very heavy, and she stumbled.

Crash! She blundered over some obstacle in her path, and the noise seemed to ring through the whole ruined house.

Next moment the hunted look returned to her pallid face, as she heard the man on guard below conning into the house, calling in a challenging voice:

"Hallo—hallo! Who's up there? Answer, please!"

Stranger Still.

BETTY BARTON suddenly awoke from her sleep with a feeling that the bed had one blanket too many.

"Phew, how hot it is!" she fumed, with a restless fling of her arms. "Is it the room, I wonder? I never used to get like this at Morcové."

For a few seconds she held still, then lightened the bed coverings and tried to get to sleep again. But it was no use. Such waves of heat seemed to come over her, she began to imagine all sorts of unpleasant things as the cause.

Perhaps the Priory was not a healthy house, and they had all taken a fever! Houses lying in a hollow were never so safe to live in as those on high ground. Or—Gracious, was it another case of fire?

This last notion was one she soon dismissed, almost laughing at herself for being so silly.

"All the same, I can't stand it," she exclaimed softly, a minute later. "We girls are not used to stuffy rooms. It's awful!"

And then a familiar voice drawled drowsily:

"Yes, wather, bai Jove! Most distwessing!"

"Oh, Paula!" whispered Betty. "Do you feel the same, too? As if the room were too hot?"

"Yes, wather! And yet the window is open, bai Jove?"

"That's what I can't make out! I say—"

Betty was interrupted by murmurs from Polly, Madge, and Tess, as they also suddenly opened their eyes.

"Phew! How hot—"

"Stiffing! No wonder I was dreaming of the fire again!"

"Why is it, girls? Betty—"

"Yes, I'm going to find out!" declared the Form captain, stepping down on to the floor.

Her chums were out of their beds an instant later. Having put on something or other to guard against a sudden chill, they went to the door. Betty opened it, and they all looked out.

"Quite all wight," Paula commented.

"No fire this time, anyhow," said Betty, with a grim smile. "So why—"

"It is perfectly nippy out here," whispered Polly, taking a step into the passage. "And a cold autumn night out of doors."

"Bai Jove, it's extwaordinawy!" was Paula's helpless remark. "I was feeling downright wosted, bai Jove, when I woke up!"

Betty turned back into the room, and all at once she gave an astounded gasp.

"Oh, come and feel this wall!" was her excited whisper. "Just here—by the fireplace. It's burning hot!"

Nor had she exaggerated.

Next second all five girls had their hands to that part of the wall, and their flesh could hardly bear the heat.

"Queer!"

"A licker!" was Polly's way of expressing it.

"Yes, wather! Geals—"

"I suppose," Madge broke out, "the flue from the kitchen-range comes up this wall? They had a big fire downstairs to-day."

"But the time now!" said Betty. "Half-past twelve! However big a fire they had at the kitchen-range during the day, surely the chimney should have cooled off by now!"

"Besides," said Tess, "it could not have been like this when we first came up to bed."

"No, And," said Polly, "it was not like this last night!"

What, then, in the name of marvels, was the explanation?

The girls could not suggest one. They were baffled, mystified, and not a little alarmed.

Then suddenly Betty had a shrewd idea.

"I've got it! At least, it may be the reason—it may be. The kitchen fire may have set the chimney alight—"

"And the chimney has been burning all this time. Of course!" struck in Polly.

"Wouldn't we have smelt soot?" demurred Tess.

"Not necessarily," said Madge. "I think that really must be the explanation. But can't we find out?"

"We ought to. We must!"

"Yes, wather!"

And so, after a whispered debate, they took steps to satisfy themselves that it really was only a chimney fire, and that the burning soot was not going to lead to any unpleasant developments.

Hurriedly putting on some clothes, and treading cautiously together along the corridor, they presently went up one broad flight of steps after another, until they were on the top landing.

There was a skylight here, with a wooden ladder leading up to it. Betty went first, and was able to open the glazed frame a little wider. She scrambled out on to the flat roof, and the others followed.

Bitter cold was the moonlight night out there, but the girls were amply protected. Keeping together, they trod their way across the leads to one of several clusters of stone chimneys.

It was the set of chimneys which, they reckoned, must be directly above the bedroom in which they slept. So from one of these chimneys smoke should have been belching thickly if there were soot burning in the flue.

But in vain the girls gazed in search of smoke. All they saw was the cluster of tall, stone chimneys, standing out against the moonlit sky.

"Well!" whispered Polly. "If that doesn't beat everything!"

"No fire at all!" was Tess's blank remark.

"No smoke, anyway," muttered Betty. "Look closer, though. Are you sure there is no heat

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coming from one of the chimneys? Doesn't the air above it seem to quiver?"

"Why, yes, it does!"

"Yes, wather!" Paula chimed in emphatically. "Furvious heat, too, I wather imagine!"

"Then where—Why—" Polly asked; but her chums could only shake their heads helplessly. The one feasible explanation, suggested by Betty, had not met the case.

There was no chimney blaze, caused by too big a fire down in the kitchen during the day. There was only that haze of heat above one chimney, suggesting that somewhere in the great old house, at dead of night, a fierce, clear fire was burning!

And that, surely, was enough to leave the girls more astounded than ever!

So utterly at a loss did they feel, they must have been standing there in complete silence for a couple of minutes when they received another shock.

Out of the intense stillness of the nightbound world which lay around them there came a faint sound.

What Does it Mean?

"BAI JOVE!"

"Sh! She must not hear us!" "It is Myra, right enough!" Polly said, in a tenser whisper than ever. "But wherever has she been? What is it she is carrying?" "Some box, I make it out to be," came in a guarded tone from Madge. "Girls, do you remember the morning after the fire—how Myra tried to enter the burnt-out school?"

"Why, of course!"

"Hush!" Betty cautioned again.

"We thought at the time that Myra seemed desperately anxious to get inside the building. She must have been over there to-night," Polly exclaimed, with conviction. "The box is what she has been wanting to recover—from her study, I suppose."

Then the excited girls lapsed into silence, whilst they still watched the mysterious prefect.

It seemed obvious to them that she was going to come straight across the moonlit grounds to re-enter the old house from which she had made this midnight excursion. Suddenly she struck



GOOD CAUSE FOR ALARM!

"Come and feel this wall!" Betty called out as she pressed her hand to the wainscoting. "It's burning hot!"

All five girls heard it, and somehow each was ready to declare that only some prowling person could have made it. Nothing to do with any bird or beast—no!

In the moonlight they exchanged glances, and then of one accord they moved cautiously towards one edge of the roof.

Crouching down behind the stone parapet, they peered over, seeing the wilderness of old gardens and neglected shrubberies spread out before them like a map.

Five—ten—fifteen seconds must have gone by like this. And then Polly exclaimed softly:

"Look—look! The shrubbery on the right. Do you see?"

Yes, they could all see what she durst not stretch forth a hand to point out—a vague figure emerging from the jungle of neglected shrubs.

"Some woman—or a girl, is it?" questioned Madge, below her breath.

In another instant Betty was saying softly:

"Do you know, I believe it is Myra Marshall!"

aside into another bit of shrubbery, and for ten minutes at least the watchers saw nothing of her. Then she reappeared, and the box was no longer in her possession!

Betty and Co. thrilled from head to foot.

"She's hidden it—buried it, most likely! What a lark!" Polly panted. "To-morrow we can search there, and then—"

"We may solve the whole mystery," put in Tess eagerly.

"Yes, wather! Howevah—"

"If you are going to suggest getting back to our room, I'm with you, Paula," whispered Betty. "Myra has got out of sight now, and we sha'n't be able to see her any more. She has finished for the night, that's certain."

"Yes, bai Jove, and if we stop heah much longer, gals, I—I wather fancy I shall sneeze," was the alarming admission from Paula.

That settled it!

Back to the skylight darted the girls, and by good luck they regained their bedroom before

Paula could cause any disaster by giving way to a paroxysm of sneezing. Hardly had they shut themselves in, however, when:

"Rushoo!" sneezed Paula.

"Sh! Quiet!" Polly entreated desperately.

"Quite all right, Polly deah! Howevah, hav-ing wefwained fwom sneezing all the way back, surely I may be allowed to— Rushoo! Tishoo! Tishoo!"

"You duffer! Do you want to—"

"Tishoo!" Paula sneezed again. "I meahly want to wagain my bweath, Polly. It is extwemely unfortunate, but whenever I start to— to— tishoo—I feel downwight pwestwate!"

At that instant they heard the tell-tale creak of a floorboard, round by the stairs.

"Oh, look out! That is Myra, coming to see if we are all asleep!" Betty whispered, and made a dart for her own bed.

In a flash the others also were between the sheets. Heads were ducked down, bed-coverings were drawn high; the room seemed to be harbouring five girls who were fast asleep!

But when the door creaked open, as it did presently, and Myra Marshall peered into the room, from each of those five beds a pair of eyes contrived to see without being seen!

For a long moment the girl prefect stood motionless, peering around to satisfy herself that all was as it should be.

Then, with an audible sigh of relief, she stepped back, and the door closed without a sound.

She was gone, but many minutes had elapsed before Betty and Co. could feel it was safe to talk in whispers.

Having begun a discussion at last, however, they kept it up for a long, long while—and to what effect?

None whatever, so far as reaching a solution of all the strange happenings was concerned.

Only, in a vague way, they felt bound to associate Myra Marshall with something that was going on in secret at this great old house that had become the school in the woods.

Was it for the purpose of keeping an eye upon them that Myra had got herself appointed as their prefect? Had the old house its mysterious secret, and was that the reason why she was so anxious to hamper their freedom of the place? Because they might suddenly find out too much, perhaps!

It might be so—yes. But, in that case, what was the secret?

What had the box which she had hidden to-night to do with the whole strange business?

Above all, was Myra the only person concerned in the secret? If not, with whom was she allied?

"I'd like to know," said Polly, when at last the excited debate was quite talked out.

"I think we ought to find out," said Madge.

"I think we shall, in the end," was Betty's impressive rejoinder.

"Then to-morrow—" said Tess.

"Ah, to-morrow!"

And Paula, as she snuggled down to get to sleep, at last, murmured an emphatic:

"Yes, wather!"

[END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.]

Myra Marshall's actions grow more and more mysterious. No wonder Betty & Co. are resolved to find out what she is doing. Don't fail to read next week's long complete Morcove story, entitled "The Treasure of the Well!" and see how the schoolgirl detectives go to work. The small reproduction of next week's cover shown below depicts one of the many exciting episodes with which the story is crowded.

A THRILLING INCIDENT
from NEXT TUESDAY'S
Splendid Long Complete
MORCOVE STORY

"The Treasure
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The
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NEXT WEEK'S COVER