

No. 1 ON SALE TO-DAY. "THE SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN LIBRARY."

The Schoolgirls' Own



BETTY AT BAY!

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

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MYRA MARSHALL'S FEAR!

A magnificent new long complete story of the girls of Morcove School telling of strange happenings in their temporary quarters at the Old Priory.

By MARJORIE STANTON

"The Work Must Go On!"

THE chilly dawn of an autumn morning was just breaking upon the hushed world of Morcove.

A moment since Myra Marshall had given a little sigh of deep dejection as she opened her eyes upon the new day. Now she was lying on her bed in this comfortable room at the Priory, looking very little refreshed after the night's rest.

It was not yet time to get up. Silence still brooded over the whole house, and it would be another hour yet before the jangle-jangle of "first bell" was followed by all the pleasant commotion of some forty girls' hasty dressing for another day of school life.

So this older girl, who, by right of her position as a senior and a prefect, had a bedroom to herself, might well have turned over to snatch another wink or two of sleep. She certainly stood in need of it.

Instead, she sat up in bed, gave another sigh that was very much like a moan, and swept a hand across her brow.

Then she yawned—not the yawn of a girl naturally and pleasantly reluctant to leave a soft, warm bed on a very nippy morning, but the yawn of one who has been awake half the night with anxiety.

She threw back the coverings and stepped down on to the floor, all in a listless fashion. Mechanically she performed her ablutions and dressed herself, doing everything with a good deal of stealth.

Not a sound, indeed, had she made to disturb any other inmates of the great old house by the time she was ready to pass from the room. Moodily she stood at the window, which had been open all night to the fresh breezes of North Devon, seeming to ponder the wisdom of a certain step she was inclined to take. A nod of the head at last marked her decision, and then she tip-toed across to the door.

Not a sound as she opened that door and stole out into the corridor. On tip-toe still, as she went down the stairs and along some back passages to a rear door of the house. Really this girl's consideration for people in the place who were still asleep was most creditable!

Or was it simply a case of her having something to do with great secrecy, before anybody else was about?

For, even when she had silently drawn back the bolts and had slipped out into the open air, stealthiness still marked her every movement.

Glancing this way and that in guilty fashion, she darted to cover in one of the big shrubberies which were the main feature of the mansion's long-neglected grounds.

The sun was breaking out through the silvery clouds; birds were chrousing amongst the branches; the keen air was invigorating. But Myra Marshall was as heavy-hearted and nervous-looking as ever by the time she had picked her way to a handsome lodge standing just inside the main gateway.

Working round to the back door, she rapped softly.

Then she lifted the latch and walked in, for the door was only on the latch.

"Mrs. Carnay!" she called softly. "Can I have a word with you?"

Above the stairs a bedroom door was opened, and a voice responded silkily:

"You, Myra, at this unearthly hour!"

"Yes, I'm sorry if I have disturbed you, but—"

"Oh, it is all right! One moment, and I'll be down."

So Myra passed into a sitting-room that was furnished very comfortably, and there drifted about restlessly, waiting for the lady to come down.

By now this room should have been flooded with morning sunlight, but roller-blinds were drawn down at the windows, and they were of dark green holland, keeping the place in deep gloom.

Gloomy and chilly, indeed, as the atmosphere of what should certainly have been a bright, cosy little home; and perhaps that was why a shiver suddenly ran through the schoolgirl.

Then someone with a light step and trailing garments could be heard descending the stairs, and next moment the woman called Mrs. Carnay was gliding into the room.

"Well, dear?" she greeted Myra winningly.

The girl's face scarcely brightened at all, although everything about the lady who confronted her was most inspiring. Tall and graceful, her stately figure draped about by a dressing-gown of brilliant character, Mrs. Carnay was a personality that might be expected to banish gloom from any heart. She was a woman who seemed to have kept all the spirit of youth, as her hair had kept its beautiful plour—that of ripe corn. Her smile was the sweetest.

"Early bird!" she laughed at Myra. "How often had you knocked at the door, my dear, without my hearing you?"

"Only once—"

"Really? Rather wonderful, then," was Mrs.

Carnay's light comment. "Considering I did not get to bed until four in the morning, it is a wonder I was not sleeping like the dead!"

She added, scanning the girl's face:

"You, also, missed your beauty sleep last night, my dear."

"I was ages getting to sleep—yes," acknowledged Myra. "And even when I did get off at last, I— Oh, I have had a wretched time altogether!" she exclaimed miserably.

"Pity!" said Mrs. Carnay softly. "But is there any real reason why you should be so—fidgety?"

"Yes, Mrs. Carnay, there is."

Myra flashed back the answer in great agitation.

"Mrs. Carnay," she said excitedly, "I don't see how we can possibly go on much longer without being found out. I suppose things were as safe as could be when you and your husband were renting this lodge and the Priory itself was standing empty. But—"

She drew a deep breath.

"When that fire occurred at Morecove School and some of the girls had to be quartered at the Priory, it made things frightfully risky," she urged.

"It was annoying, I grant you," Mrs. Carnay said, with an airy shrug. "My husband and I were very annoyed, of course, to see a pack of school-girls suddenly dumped down into the mansion from up yonder. But we talked things over, my dear, and we decided that those same girls need not put a stop to—the work."

"Well, I think—"

"You think my husband and I are too daring?" Mrs. Carnay shrugged again, and smiled. "We certainly are not cowards, Myra, flying into a panic on account of those schoolgirls. Sweet creatures!" She laughed. "You know, I get along quite well with them."

"You do not realise the full extent of the danger, I am sure," Myra said, still as agitated as ever. "Some of those girls like nothing better than to play detective. Only let them pick up a clue or so that seems to indicate a mystery, and they are never happy until they have solved it. There is Betty Barton, for instance, the Fourth Form captain—"

"Oh, yes! I have made friends with that girl."

"And her chum, Polly Linton—several girls who are the captain's greatest friends."

"Yes, I know them all," Mrs. Carnay said, as airily as before. "Nice girls—very! And I fancy they think me nice, too—as I hope I am."

She turned to smile at herself in a mirror, and fiddled with her hair.

Myra stood regarding her for a long moment, seeming to think: "What a wonderful woman you are, indeed! Certainly charming enough, outwardly; as nice before the world at large as you are daring in secret."

"Now, tell me," the woman went on soothingly, "what exactly is the cause for alarm, Myra dear? Have you had any hint from those girls that they—suspect something?"

"N-n-no," the senior scholar answered, after thinking deeply for an instant. "Only, you have asked me to prevent them from poking and prying about the mansion too much, and I warn you—I feel I must warn you—it is a hard task for me to carry out."

"Well? Is that all?"

"It is not all, by any means," sighed Myra, "though I can hardly put the rest into words. All I know is, it seems frightfully risky for you—and

Mr. Carnay to be going on with the work—just as usual—when those girls are all over the place."

Mrs. Carnay nodded.

"I see!" And then, with the first sign of gravity: "Now, listen to me, Myra dear," she said impressively. "There is no doubt that it would have been worlds better if the work could have been stopped during the girls' temporary occupation of the Priory. But instead of being able to go slow for the time being, my husband and I are faced with the necessity of getting on as fast as possible."

"Because?" Myra hinted, with a frightened expression.

"Yes, because the time is not far off when we may have to clear out—and very quickly, too! So quickly, that we shall not have time to get our things away," Mrs. Carnay said, nodding impressively. "In other words, my dear, we must make all the stuff we can whilst we can, taking our chance with your precious schoolgirls."

Myra Marshall chafed her cold hands together. She was still a prey to terrible uneasiness, and perhaps some murmur of anxiety would have come from her, but all at once a footfall sounded on the back-garden path.

"Ah, there is my husband—only my husband, so don't look so jumpy!" Mrs. Carnay said. "Did you think it was one of your ubiquitous schoolgirl detectives?"

The derisive remark failed to dispel Myra's haggard look of fear.

"I—I had better go," she quavered hastily. "In a few minutes the whole school—"

"Oh, you must wait and say good-morning to my husband!"

Even as Mrs. Carnay made that smooth remark her husband came through from the back entrance into the sitting-room.

Where he had been at this early hour, and what doing, was not to transpire; but he looked just like a man returning from some night shift in a factory or workshop.

His gentlemanly appearance was altogether absent at present. He was in old, work-worn clothes; his hands were grimed with the toil that had engaged him; his handsome face looked as if it had been exposed to the heat of a furnace.

"Myra—eh? At this time of day!" he exclaimed, with just the same nonchalance that his wife possessed. "Well, young lady, and what brings you here? You look—uneasy."

"She is uneasy—far too uneasy," put in Mrs. Carnay, with slight impatience. "All on account of those other girls, of course. If they had given a hint that they suspected something, it would be different; but—"

"They had not hinted at anything like that—eh?" he broke in, regarding Myra keenly.

"N-n-no!" was the same feeble answer as before. "Only—"

"Well, then, don't you get fretting, Myra," he said coolly. "It will be all right."

"Myra thinks the work should stop," said Mrs. Carnay.

"Myra must help us to get the work finished," was the quiet rejoinder. "Stop? No! I have put in a fine big shift during the night. Let me get on as well for, say, another week—"

"Another week?" gasped Myra. "Working every night!"

"Ay—"

"And the girls all the time—"

"The girls won't be a trouble so long as

they keep to their part of the mansion," Michael Carnay said calmly.

He turned aside to put away an electric torch which he had been carrying in one hand.

"Yes, quite a fine night's work," he resumed, sinking into a low chair with a sigh of weariness. "So now, what about some breakfast? Myra, will you stay?"

"Oh, no, no!" she exclaimed quickly. "I was just saying to your wife—I ought to get back to the house at once. First bell will be going in a minute, and then—"

She was making a flustered movement towards the passage whilst she spoke. Checking for a moment, she spoke a hasty "Good-bye for the present, then!" and stepped on towards the back door.

Mrs. Carnay followed her, to give her a sort of last "cheer-up" glance, and then turned back into the sitting-room, a smile of contempt playing about her lips.

"Absurd of her," she remarked scornfully, "to be in such a stew! I am perfectly certain, Michael dear, we have nothing to fear from those schoolfellows of hers."

"Of course not!" he agreed, lighting a cigarette. "A mere parcel of schoolgirls—bah!"

And he blew a cloud of smoke before him and laughed.

How Will This Journey End?

"HALLO, Betty! So you are up already?"

"Yes, Polly."

"What sort of a morning is it?"

"Oh, perfect!"

"Hurrah!"

"Yes, wather!" Paula Creel agreed, rather drowsily, and perhaps hardly knowing what she was saying, as she heaved over in her warm bed and rubbed her eyes. "Bai Jove, I've slept like a top, you geals! I feel wemarkably wewashed."

"Oh, look at Betty!" exclaimed one other occupant of this particular bedroom, as she suddenly sat up in her bed. This was Tess Trelawney, and Tess seemed to be amazed at the sight of Betty standing, fully dressed, at the open window.

"What's the idea, Betty?" chuckled Tess. "Some new patent deep-breathing exercise, or what? Turn round and let us have a look at you!"

Betty, however, kept her sentinel-like attitude at the window, her gaze still fixed upon the mansion grounds, that were spread before her in the bright light of early morning.

"Betty's all right," said Madge Minden, responding to the clangour of first bell by springing out of bed. "She is only drinking in the beauty of the morning. And if you were the artist you set up to be, Tess dear, you would have been doing the same this last half-hour."

"Instead of which," said Polly, the madcap, making a sudden rush and stripping Tess's bed of all its coverings, "you won't get up until you are made to! Same with you, Paula!"

"Polly deah—"

"Out of it, Paula! Sharp!"

"Polly deah, don't you begin anothah day by being fwirolous!" pleaded Paula, struggling to retain the blankets which Polly was meaning to rob her of. "Go away, Polly deah; pway do!"

"Out of bed, then! Look sharp, and drink in the beauties of the morning!"

"I would much wather dwink a nice cup of tea, bai Jove!" sighed Paula. "Howevah—"

And, very reluctantly, she gracefully arose from her bed and stretched herself, yawning the while.

"Yes, geals, I slept wemarkably well."

"You slept as you always do sleep," teased Polly—"like a log! Half a dozen times I should think I awoke in the night, and I could always hear you snoring."

"Polly deah, I object to your wafewing to my mode of wespivation as snoring," said Paula, starting her morning toilette.

"Well, anyhow, you slept like a top, and how you could, I don't know," said Polly. "The room got as hot as ever in the night."

"Yes, it did. I woke up, feeling ever so hot," agreed Tess. "But I felt just too lazy to get up and start any investigations. After



A STRANGE COSTUME! Michael Carnay entered the room where Myra Marshall and his wife were. He was wearing overalls, as though he had just returned from a night shift in a factory.

all, we got very excited our first night at this house, and tried to find out where the heat was coming from."

"Yes, wather!"

"And what did our investigations lead to?" asked Polly. "You, Betty—answer! You are all in a dream this morning."

Then Betty turned round at the window.

"I am not in a dream," she smiled. "I had something to make me feel very much awake, whilst you girls were still snoozing."

"Oh!" Polly remarked, her brows going up. "My word! Do you mean to say that you have taken the case a step farther already this morning?"

"Bai Jove!"

"Tell us, Betty!" pleaded Tess, whilst Madge murmured to the same effect. "We may like our

bit of nonsense talk, but if there is any—any development—”

“Yes, wather!”

And Betty, as she came away from the window, found herself quite surrounded by the four chums who were her fellow occupants of this bedroom.

“I want to tell you at once,” she said, in a lowered tone. “Girls, when I chanced to wake up in advance of you just now, I hopped out of bed to see what the morning was like. I was standing at the window, looking all over the grounds—”

“And suddenly—” prompted Polly.

“Quite right! Suddenly I saw a thing that startled me. And what do you think it was? Guess?” said Betty.

But, before any of her chums could do that, there came an interruption which made them grimace resentfully.

The bedroom door was tapped by somebody who wanted to enter.

“Oh, bother!” fumed Polly. “And it is Myra Marshall, for a certainty!”

She was wrong there, however.

They could have done without an interruption of any sort just then, with Betty on the point of making that thrilling disclosure. But when they opened the door and found that it was Miss Redgrave, their popular undermistress, who stood revealed, their annoyance passed.

Miss Redgrave was just about as much liked by the Fourth Form as Myra Marshall was disliked, which is saying a good deal!

“Ah, here is a girl who has finished dressing, and who can do my errand for me!” Miss Redgrave exclaimed, smiling, as she took note of Betty Barton. “You won’t mind, Betty?”

“A run before brekker, is that it?” the Form captain returned eagerly. “Oh, I’m ready for that! A morning like this!”

“As far as the old school and back.”

“Yes, Miss Redgrave. I shall love it!”

“Thank you, Betty dear; I am so glad,” the young lady declared, in a tone of relief. “Come along, then, and I’ll explain the reason for your errand.”

With that, the youthful mistress turned back to the passage, and Betty only lingered a moment to pass a discreet word to her chums.

“I must tell you afterwards! You know—what I saw from the window!”

Then she was hastening away to rejoin Miss Redgrave, leaving behind four girls who looked at one another and grimaced ruefully.

“Just as we were getting to the exciting part,” mumbled Polly. “It’s like one of those serial stories in the weekly papers.”

Betty, meanwhile, had to attend Miss Redgrave in that young lady’s own private room, where a cup of tea was waiting to be poured out.

“I didn’t mean to let you go off without just one cup and a biscuit,” said Miss Redgrave, when she had given the Form captain a seat at the table. “You can drink that, Betty, whilst I am explaining.”

It proved to be a very simple errand, after all, that Betty was to perform.

Here at the temporary quarters of the Fourth and Fifth Forms there was urgent need for certain things which had been got out of Morcove School by salvage men since the night of the fire.

Miss Redgrave had a long list of things which were required as soon as possible, and Betty’s instructions were to take this list to the officer

in charge of the burnt-out building, so that that worthy could have the desired articles rummaged out and sent over during the morning.

“Right!” said Betty, setting down the empty cup and jumping up ready to be off. “I’ll get a bike, and be over to Morcove and back in a jiffy!”

“Oh, you needn’t be as quick as all that!” laughed the mistress. “Take your own time coming back, anyhow. You will be excused morning school, dear.”

“How jolly! I didn’t expect that treat!”

“You will have earned it,” was the smiling rejoinder. “Miss Massingham will be very pleased when I tell her that I found you up and dressed, just as if you had been warned for the journey overnight. Good-bye, dear!”

Miss Redgrave was stopping short in the doorway to dismiss the girl with that affectionate word and a little wave of the hand. Betty looked behind her as she ran to smile good-bye, and so they parted, only for a couple of hours or so, as they both imagined, and only because of such a simple little errand!

But—ah, what a time of frightful anxiety was to elapse—what strange, thrilling happenings there were to be before ever Betty Barton’s bright eyes looked into Miss Redgrave’s again!

Unseen Eyes Are Watching.

“HALLO—hallo, there! Coo-ee! Is anybody about?”

That was Betty Barton’s challenging cry, some fifty minutes later, as she stood in the porch of the burnt-out schoolhouse on Morcove’s breezy headland.

It was not the first time, by any means, that Betty had visited the dear old place since the night of the fire. She had become accustomed to the sad sight of the once handsome building in its present state of devastation! But hardened to that sight? No!

As sharp a pang as ever had shot through her breast when she first glimpsed the ruined building this morning. And now, whilst she stood waiting there in the porch for an answer to her call, she sighed sadly over the fate which had befallen the school she loved so dearly.

It was all very well to remember that the work of restoring the place was to start in a day or so, and that contractors had promised to have the school ready for re-opening after the Christmas holidays. But this did not make the calamity of the fire any less deplorable.

Betty stepped away from the blackened porch to gaze all over the old playing fields—acres of level grass that had been the scene of many a historic match, and to-day they were a dumping-ground for goods brought away from the half-ruined building. A sad sight—yes, and she was heaving another big sigh when her keen hearing picked up the hollow step of someone treading heavily through the otherwise lifeless place.

In a few moments she was saying good-morning to a man in uniform as he came forth from the porch.

“Nice morning, miss, to be sure!” was his genial response. “And you must ha’ been up early to get here at this hour. Come from the Priory, have you?”

Betty answered a smiling yes, and proceeded to business by handing over the envelope containing the list.

“I was asked to say, please, if you could get any of those things on the list sorted out and sent over to the Priory it would be a great help.”

"Right you are, miss," was the hearty reply. "I'll see to it at once, you tell whoever sent you. I know you are leading a bit of a make-shift life over there, and all credit to you, I'm sure. Well, I'll do my best, you say, with my best respects."

"Thank you," Betty cried, smiling back into the good fellow's honest eyes. "Then I'll be off back at once on my bike. Good-morning!"

"Morning, miss!" Betty had left her cycle propped against the stem of an elm-tree in a corner of the playing-field. She ran across to it and rode away, tuffing about in the saddle just as she reached the gateway to wave a gay farewell to the man on guard.

Then, gaining the open road, she pedalled along at a nice even pace, the morning breeze ruffling her glossy hair and fanning a face that was just a little grave.

Whatever her thoughts may have been, for a time they seemed to have no connection with this homeward spin to the Priory. By and by, however, she slowed down when there was no apparent reason for slowing, as if some idea in her mind had dictated a reduced speed.

And at last, when she was in sight of the school in the woods—as the girls dubbed their make-shift quarters—Betty even dismounted and walked on, wheeling the machine.

Before her lay the winding, downhill road to the wooded hollow in which the old Priory stood, and just imagine Betty missing the chance of a glorious free-wheel spin all the rest of the way home! But that is just what she did.

For some grave enough reason, too, she suddenly turned off the descending roadway, taking her machine with her along a mere beaten track amongst the trees.

In zig-zag fashion this woodland path led her down the wooded slope to the outskirts of the Priory grounds. So, instead of coming to the main entrance, with its stately little lodge where Mr. and Mrs. Carnay lived, she found herself at last at a long-disused garden gate.

Betty managed to open this, although the rusty fastening proved an awful trouble. She wheeled her machine through the old gateway, and then pushed amongst some overgrown laurels with it.

There she left the cycle and went on again—not towards the mansion, but steering in a certain direction with the air of one wanting to avoid being seen.

"I am sure I can manage it," she suddenly murmured to herself, "because all the girls will have gone into school by now. How fine if I can have a still greater discovery to tell Polly and the others about later on!"

In the centre of a very jungle of old ever-greens she stood at a loss suddenly; but she got her direction again by the sun's position, and stepped on, every step a cautious one.

Then came a bit of open ground, which she only sped across after making quite sure that she would not be seen. The sharp run carried her to another shrubbery, and into this she penetrated skilfully, suddenly emerging upon a tiny open space where the tall grass was all trampled about.

But it was not entirely rank grass that met the eye here. Two quick strides, and Betty was standing close to a slab of stone which, she happened to know, covered the mouth of a well.

"Now," she whispered excitedly, "we girls found the slab easy enough to raise when we came here together, so why shouldn't I lift it up, and

then see if that latest idea of mine is right or wrong?"

She added to herself, as she bent to grapple with the slab:

"Oh, I do wonder if that iron plate in the wall of the well is an iron door? Only let me get down to it, and I will soon find out. If it is just a plate that was put in when the brickwork was repaired, I shall be able to tell at once. But my belief is—"

The exertion of raising the slab checked the girl's excited murmurings. Twice before had Betty gone through the task of up-ending the stone, but on each of those occasions she had had chums with her to lend a hand. Now she was all alone, and, although the stone slab had some sort of counterweight to make it possible for one person to raise it, she found the task quite hard enough.

By the time the slab had been turned right over upon the grass, leaving the mouth of the well exposed to view, she was breathless and shaky. But she hardly took a moment to steady up.

Had she done so, from what deadly peril might she have been saved just in time! If only she had paused a moment or two, surely her keen hearing would have detected a rustling of the foliage in the bushes round about, faint though that rustling was!

But sheer eagerness to satisfy curiosity forbade an instant's delay. In a flash she was preparing to clamber down the well by means of the iron footholds which had felt the pressure of her feet less than twelve hours ago.

Her previous descent of the well gave quickness to the girl's movements. Without the least faltering of her strong nerve, down-down she began to clamber. And all the while she little knew how a pair of eyes watched from amongst the bushes round about!

Step by step—down she went, so that her head and shoulders were no longer visible above ground. In that confined space formed by the circular shaft, every little sound was intensified, and so, although she was no longer visible, the girl could be heard.

Now and then her feet could be heard scraping on the iron footholds, whilst even her hard breathing was faintly audible.

Then came a spell of dead silence indeed; but it gave place at last to a clear sound, like that of hammering.

It was as if Betty Barton, mid-way down the shaft, had paused to strike sounding blows upon a sheet of iron.

These tell-tale sounds were still coming from the well when a tall figure stole with catlike tread from amongst the bushes, and then stood listening in the open.

It was the sinister figure of Mrs. Carnay!

"Help—Help!"

MID-WAY down the circular shaft of the old well Betty Barton was spending some of the most thrilling moments that she had ever known.

It was not that she felt any sense of peril as she clung to the wall by means of the iron, horse-shoe shaped footholds, which were as good as so many rungs to a vertical ladder.

The mere task of climbing down the shaft had proved a trifling matter to a girl so well-trained in all forms of athletics.

What excited her was the discovery that she had been right in her recently formed idea that



OBSERVED! With a great effort Betty Barton succeeded in turning back the stone slab that covered the well. Then she prepared to descend.

the shaft was something more than a well now in disuse.

She had clambered down as far as the iron plate, and, by kicking against it with one foot, had convinced herself that there was a hollow space behind the sheet of iron.

This, as she realised, would not have been the case if the plate had merely been placed there to prevent some weak brickwork from falling in.

"It is a door—a small iron door, right enough," she was panting to herself excitedly. "And if I can't open it at once, I shall come again. I'll come again and again with Polly and the others until we do manage to—Hallo!"

She added a delighted "Oh, good!" as she looked closer at the crevice between the edge of the iron plate and the brickwork.

In one place there was just room for her to work her finger-ends in. So now for a good try at opening the secret door! Surely she could manage, unless, of course, it was bolted on the inside.

Firmly she dug her fingers into the crevice, and to her joy she was able to hook them round the edge of the plate.

What a tug and an outward pull she gave then! Her position was a most cramped one, and she was just about breathless. Still she tugged and pulled, encouraged in her efforts by the fact that the plate seemed inclined to open outwards on concealed hinges.

And suddenly it yielded.

Betty could have given a panting "Hurrah!" of delight.

The iron plate did not fly round upon its hinges.

It opened an inch or two very stiffly, owing to disuse. But for Betty to force the door wider open by a series of jerks was a simple task.

So at last it was standing fully open—a heavy plate of iron, rustier than ever on its inner side, on which the hinges were visible.

"My word!" panted the excited girl.

She was already peering round into the cavernous opening in the side of the well which the iron plate had concealed.

"Just as I guessed when I saw that Mr. Carnay stealing out of the shrubbery before first bell this morning," she muttered. "I felt sure he had come away from the well, and that it was a way in to some secret passage. And here the passage is!"

Should she go in right away and explore? Yes, was her daring decision! She would have just one look round inside, and so be able to tell Polly and the rest a fine, exciting story of amazing discoveries when they came out of morning school!

One glance she shot aloft, seeing only a round of blue sky framed by the mouth of the well. Then she returned her gaze to the secret opening in the side of the shaft.

A tricky business, shifting oneself from the ladder-like foothold in the wall into the passage entrance. But she managed it, her grasp of the open iron door helping her. In a few moments she was on all fours in the narrow tunnel.

Quickly her eyes grew accustomed to the gloom, and she peered along the passage. It seemed to go in a straight, horizontal line away from the well, but whither did it lead? That was what Betty wanted to know—at once!

She stood up, the crown of her head almost touching the roof of the passage. Ugh, it was not a nice place! It gave one the eerie sensation of being in a great conduit bored through the earth to carry away vast resources of water.

All at once she was wondering, with a shiver, if that was really the purpose for which the tunnel had been made. Wherever she touched the lining of the passage, it was quite dry. All the same, she had the horrid feeling that at some time or other this tunnel, which she was treading had been surging with a great flood of icy water.

Then, in the dark, she got a real scare. Without knowing it, she had turned a bend, and had come to a place where there were two or three steps to go down. She did not see them, but simply went forward and so trod upon nothing, as it were.

Everybody has had the same experience at some time or other, when going downstairs in groping darkness, and everybody knows the awful sensation it confers. Betty had that sensation in its acutest form.

After her blind stumble she got up with a gasp that seemed to fill the dark tunnel with sighing sounds.

"I must go back!" she panted to herself. "It's not nice. It may not be safe! Yes, I'll turn back now, and some other time we will all come with lanterns. Then—"

Her breathless whisperings suddenly checked. Perfectly rigid she stood, her blood running cold.

Was she alone in the passage?

Surely that was a slithering step she had heard just then! The stealthy footfall of someone else gliding along the same passageway which she had followed!

Taking a grip upon herself, she moved to go

back. Shakily she mounted the few shallow steps, and went a pace or so towards the bend. Once round that, and she would be able to see the rest of the way to the passage-entrance.

But what did she find in the instant that she turned the corner?

She found an advancing figure obscuring the feeble light from the mouth of the tunnel. Her ears had not deceived her just now. Someone else was here!

A woman—a woman so tall that she had to stoop low to avoid striking the roof with her head.

Every instinct Betty possessed made her feel that this vague figure was no friendly one. But each had seen the other, and the only thing to do was to speak.

"Hallo!" Betty forced herself to say, as if she were only pleasantly surprised. "This—this is a queer place, isn't it?"

The woman did not answer. She came on slowly and steadily, and all at once the girl recognised her.

"Mrs. Carnay! Oh!"

"I am Mrs. Carnay—yes," came the hollow answer. "And you—you are—"

"I'm Betty Barton—one of the scholars, you know. You remember speaking to me?"

The alarmed girl was merely talking so as to appear unsuspecting and at ease. All the time she was thinking desperately:

"This is a woman I must get away from. She is mixed up in the mystery. She and her husband, they have been using this secret passage for some purpose of their own!"

And every instant the woman was drawing closer.

Betty drew a deep breath, then, convinced that she was face to face with a ruthless foe, made a desperate rush to get past her.

In vain!

Out shot the woman's long, slender arms, barring the way. Another moment, and hands that were as strong as they were graceful were holding the struggling girl a prisoner.

"Help! Help!" Betty screamed, trying to battle free. "Help!"

Then a violent shaking threw her off her balance. She sank to her knees upon the passage floor, with the woman still holding her fast. She tried to renew her shouts for help, but found she had no breath. Instead, the sepulchral place gave back the hollow echo of Mrs. Carnay's pitiless laughter.

And with that dreadful laughter dinning mockingly in her ears, Betty suddenly gave out utterly and was a swooning heap upon the floor.

Where is Betty?

"**W**HAT a wellef!" said Paula.

She made the sighing remark a moment after Miss Redgrave had said "Dismiss!" to the whole class.

It was twelve o'clock, and midday was the very best time of day out of doors at this cool season of the year. With a rush, most of the girls were across to the door, and the next minute saw them divided up into the usual chummy groups as they gained the open air.

"A relief, did you say?" exclaimed Polly Linton, joining Paula on the weedy gravel drive of the Priory ground. "I don't think I ever felt so jolly glad to be let out of school!"

"Ditto, here," chimed in Tess. "It was bad enough waiting for break to come round, so that we could get a talk with Betty."

"And then she was not back from her little jaunt!" grumbled Polly. "Too bad of Betty!"

Madge, joining the others, put in a word in her usual quiet way:

"I could have understood Betty staying the whole morning over at the old school if it had not been that she had something particular to tell us. But she did seem so eager to make quite a thrilling announcement up in the bedroom when we were dressing."

"Yes, wather! Without wishing to use a stweng expression, I say bothah her having to go off like that, bai Jove! It was too exaspewating!"

"Well, she must be coming along now," said Polly, "so let's go to meet her."

The suggestion was scarcely needed. Instinctively all four girls turned their steps to go through the ground towards the main entrance, so that Betty could be met returning from her cycle ride.

"But supposing she has gone on from the old school to Barncombe?" Tess suddenly speculated. "She may have fallen in with Miss Somerfield at the school, and been given another urgent errand to do with the bike."

"Oh, don't!" cried Polly. "No, Betty will romp along in time for dinner, and then—then we shall know what the wonderful thing was that she had no time to tell us in the bedroom."

"I wonder—" Madge began; then checked



A DISTURBING ANSWER! "Where are you going?" demanded Myra Marshall. "We MIGHT be going to get change for some bad half-crowns—but we aren't," answered Polly.

herself at the sound of a voice calling to her and her chums from a little distance behind.

"You girls, where are you off to?" They faced about, and Polly muttered "Oh!" resentfully, whilst Paula breathed: "Bothah!"

The owner of the challenging voice was Myra Marshall, the Form's unpopular prefect. Up she came to the four girls, her pale face looking as irritable as ever.

"Just tell me where you are going, you girls," she requested.

"Really, Myra," demurred Madge, voicing the general resentment at such petty interference with liberty, "is this quite fair?"

"Why not keep us all on strings, and be done with it?" Polly made bold to suggest, scornfully.

"Yes, wather! Bai Jove, don't you know—"

"I don't want any impudence!" snapped Myra.

"I've a reason for asking you—"

"No doubt you have," said Tess, very demurely. In fact, the remark was so demure as to seem to have a double meaning, and Myra suddenly went paler than ever.

"What do you mean by that?" she asked, with a sudden hoarseness in her voice.

"I suppose Tess meant just what she said," struck in Polly saucily. "We have not the least doubt you have a special reason for keeping such an eye upon us always. Other girls don't come in for such pestering as we have to put up with, anyhow."

"That's because I know what you are," blustered Myra. "Fifty times more trouble to look after than any of the other girls."

"Oh, that's the simple reason, is it?" Tess said, as blandly as before. "Well, all I know is, you worry yourself a great deal for nothing, Myra."

"Yes, wather! Howevah—"

"To tell you the truth," said Polly sweetly, "we were only going to meet Betty Barton on her way back from the old school. If you thought we were going to do anything very desperate, you were mistaken, Myra."

"What do you mean—desperate?" the girl asked. She was looking jaded—all gone to pieces, a nervous wreck.

"Oh, well!" Polly shrugged. "We might, for example, be going to get change for some of the bad half-crowns that are going round, but we are not—see!"

The cheeky, flippant words left Myra utterly speechless. Like one trying to cover her utter confusion, she gave a scornful shrug, turned upon her heels, and strode away.

"Aha!" Polly chuckled softly. "That touched her—that about bad half-crowns!"

"Yes, wather! And no wondah, bai Jove, when—"

"Sh!" gestured Madge. "Take care she does not overhear us!"

And so they kept still tongues for the next few moments, walking on the while towards the entrance gates.

"I tell you," Polly had to burst out at last, "it is a great mistake to think that Myra's keeping an eye on us is simply due to a mistaken sense of duty. That girl is in hourly dread of our finding out—something!"

"Bai Jove, Polly, you are wight! Howevah," went on Paula, "don't let us twouble about Myra at present. Wheah's that Betty, is what I'm constawined to wondah!"

At that very instant Polly gave a jubilant cry:

"Hark! I hear a cycle bell—someone coming

down the road to the gates. That will be Betty, you see!"

But it was not Betty. The four girls made a sharp sprint towards the gates, only to find that the cyclist was an errand boy from Barncombe.

"Whoa! Stop a bit!" Polly sang out breezily, for he was going to turn in at the school gateway without dismounting. "Have you seen a girl on a bike, coming along?"

No. The lad was emphatic in his answer, which was to the effect that he had not seen a soul during the last two miles of his run to the Priory.

With renewed disappointment they drifted out on to the roadway, and went forward up the hill, hoping at every moment to see Betty skim into view on her machine.

But she did not come.

At one o'clock they had to go indoors for dinner, but still Betty was absent.

"I can't make it out," was Miss Redgrave's comment. "She was certainly given the morning off, but I expected her back long before this. What is she doing about her dinner?"

No news of the absentee when the girls got up from table. And now a general uneasiness set in. Just before the muster for afternoon classes, it was known that Miss Massingham was making use of the telephone.

Polly and a few others hung about in the old hall of the mansion, where the telephone was installed, really anxious to see what success, if any, would attend the mistress's inquiries.

"If the telephone at the old school has been put in order again after the fire," Miss Massingham had remarked, "I may be able to speak with the man in charge."

There was a very trying wait for her and the girls who were standing by, but at last the Barncombe exchange sent through some welcome news.

"Yes, the line to the old school has been restored," the town operator announced. "The building contractors had it done at once. I am putting you through now."

Another spell of anxious waiting, with the Priory instrument all the time making queer little sounds; then Miss Massingham suddenly became more alert than ever.

"Hallo—yes—hallo!" she cried. "Is that the school? Is that the man in charge?"

Back came the answer: "Yes, ma'am!" As if afraid of interrupting the conversation, Polly and her chums stood like figures in a tableau whilst the talk went on. They heard every word, of course, that Miss Massingham spoke, but they had to wait until the finish of the conversation before the man's replies were made known.

Then Miss Massingham told them the gist of what he had said.

Betty Barton had turned up quite early that morning, and had left the list with him. She had stayed only a few minutes, and had then ridden off, hinting that she meant to ride straight back to the Priory.

And yet she had not turned up!

Getting on for five hours since she set off for the Priory, and she was not back even now!

What did it mean? What had happened to account for her mysterious absence?

"If we are to go into afternoon school with this business on our minds," said Polly gloomily, "I can see myself doing some brilliant work—I don't think!"

But in a moment the girls were to learn that all classes were cancelled. The Form captain's prolonged absence had become a matter far too serious for the day's routine to be kept to.

If only to keep a check on the growing excitement, the mistresses at the Priory did not appeal to the scholars to set about searching for the absentees. But every girl in the place knew quite well that she was free to search, and that any bit of news throwing light on Betty's whereabouts, or on what had happened to her, would be welcomed.

So, in a few minutes, scholars could be seen going off in twos and threes in all directions. Polly, Paula, Madge, and Tess, they made a little party of their own, not because they were "cliquish," but simply because they always were inclined to drift together.

Far, indeed, from wanting to keep to themselves, they were only too glad to join forces with another batch of girls whom they chanced to come upon presently.

This was when they were as far afield as the little hamlet of Fern Grove. They came upon three girls here—Trixie Hope, Dolly Delane, and Bluebell Courtney.

"Any news?" Polly and Co. clamoured eagerly.

"Only this," answered Trixie—"a woman who lives in the village says she saw Betty riding home towards the Priory about half-past nine this morning."

"She did? Then—"

Again the unanswerable question was ready to come from the girls' lips. Why had Betty failed to reach her destination?

If she had got within the last mile or so of the Priory gates, on her homeward journey, how was it that she had failed to complete the ride?

Whilst the girls were standing quite nonplussed in the village roadway, someone came sauntering by whom they knew. It was Mr. Michael Carnay, who lived with his wife—that charming lady—at the old lodge in the Priory grounds.

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Carnay!" the girls murmured, for he was doffing his tweed cap to them all.

"By the way," he paused to say, with a sympathetic look, "I have been very sorry to hear that one of your chums is missing."

"Yes—"

"Extraordinary!" he exclaimed, caressing his clean-shaven chin. "Have your people communicated with the police?"

The girls answered that they did not know about that. They themselves were scouting around in the hope of finding some trace of their missing chum.

"Pity—a great pity!" Mr. Carnay muttered, distressfully. "My wife and I will be very anxious to know what it means. I am going back to the lodge now; presently I think I myself must take a share in the search."

"It is very kind of you, sir."

"Not at all—not at all!" he protested blandly. "One feels very concerned, naturally. Such an inexplicable thing for a girl to vanish like this!"

He added, over his shoulder, after turning to walk on:

"You must keep me and my wife informed, you know. We shall be so anxious."

He continued on his way without another word, and the girls stood looking after him, little knowing how he was suppressing the smile that wanted to play about his lips.

"Nice man!" murmured Dolly Delane. "I like his wife as well."

"Do you?" muttered Polly, with a grimace.

"Well, there are some of us who don't."

"You don't!" exclaimed Dolly, Trixie, and Bluebell, in a chorus of surprise. "Whyever not?"

And with Polly's opinion, although they did not say so, Paula, Madge, and Tess fully agreed.

Just as present it seemed very inadvisable to disclose the reasons they had for doubting the bona fides of Mr. and Mrs. Michael Carnay.

If there had been any cause for supposing that the couple were concerned with Betty's disappearance, it would have been a different matter altogether. Then, of course, the chums would have been only too eager to make a statement in the right quarter.

But there did not appear to be anything like that in the case at all. A good deal of mystery had surrounded some of the doings of Mr. and Mrs. Carnay, but that mystery, Polly and her chums felt, was a thing apart from the mystery of Betty's disappearance. And they were not going to bother any more about the Carnays until Betty had been found.

No One Will Know.

DARKNESS, a darkness heavier than that of the blackest night she had ever known!

That was the first thing Betty Barton became conscious of when at last she rallied from the deep swoon which had followed her struggle with that woman in the secret passage.

With a quivering intake of breath, the poor girl raised herself from the prone position in which she had been lying here for—she knew not how long! Hours, perhaps!

Her eyes were wide open—were trying to fathom the darkness—but she could see nothing, nothing! She had heard people talk of a darkness that could be felt, now she was experiencing it.

Where was she, then? What was her ultimate fate to be?

With a shudder she recalled the mocking laugh that Mrs. Carnay had given when the desperate struggle ended as it did—the laugh of one who was a victor, and who meant to be a merciless victor, too!

So, then, this frightful darkness was that which reigned within some underground place, some secret chamber connected with the subterranean passage; and here, perhaps, one was to be held prisoner by that relentless woman!

Betty tried to banish the alarming thought from her chaotic mind whilst she staggered to her feet; but it was a fear not to be got rid of, for the simple reason that there was so much to justify its existence.

"When I found my way into that secret passage, I was on the point of discovering some great secret, perhaps," she realised, whilst she peered about her with eyes that still failed to get accustomed to the darkness. "And now that woman, because she thinks I have found out far too much as it is, she will never let me go. Oh, what shall I do? I am at her mercy!"

Betty was no coward, but her heart failed her now.

She began to shout for help.

Deafening to her own ears were the cries, as they rang out in that confined space. Then what an appalling silence once more, as she held her breath and listened!

Yes, it must be so. She had been carried here during her heavy swoon by the ruthless woman into whose hands she had fallen, and the place was some crypt-like chamber, fashioned centuries ago, maybe, by the then occupants of the Priory.

She took some shuffling steps in the utter darkness, feeling before her with groping hands. Ten paces or so; and she fetched up against a wall.

Then she moved on again, keeping in touch with the wall every step she went. It was a little relief to her not to be all adrift in the black darkness, with nothing to lay one's hand against. It would be a great relief if she could come to some door, even though it would certainly be one that was closed against her.

Suddenly she gave a gasping, "Ah!"

The black darkness had been broken into by a tiny gleam of light. She stood quite still, staring—staring at what seemed to be a line of light shining between the foot of a distant door and the floor.

Another moment, and she felt altogether blinded—bewildered—by the flash of an electric torch full in her face.

The beam must have been directed at her like that for the express purpose of confusing her, for when it was moved aside, and the girl was able to see before her, Mrs. Carnay was standing some six paces away, and the door by which the woman had swiftly entered was now closed again.

"Come here!" the woman called sternly.

Betty never moved.

"My girl, pull yourself together and do as I tell you!" the woman said, keeping her distance. "I have brought you a lantern. Come here and light it with the matches I shall give you. Then I can switch off the torch."

With a fluttering heart Betty at last obeyed. She crossed the bare chamber, took the lantern and matches which were held out to her, and lit the wick.

Then Mrs. Carnay switched out the torch, letting it fall to her side and hang there by the thin leather strap which went over one of her slender shoulders.

"Look around," the woman counselled the girl, with a smile. "What do you see, Betty Barton?"

"A place you have brought me to," the girl answered huskily, "meaning to keep me a prisoner. Oh, I know—I know what your intention is!"

"Do you know why you are a prisoner?" Mrs. Carnay asked, with that mocking smile of hers.

"Because I—I found my way into that secret passage."

"Yes. Because you have found out far too much, my girl—that is the reason. When I saw you stealing through the grounds to that particular bit of shrubbery, I thought I had better follow you. Lucky for me and my husband that I did so."

"You and your husband!" Betty exclaimed, recovering all her spirit suddenly. "You may yet find it most unlucky to have made me a prisoner like this! You will go to prison for this when it is known."

"When?" echoed Mrs. Carnay, with a laugh. "Ha, ha, ha! You will be missed, of course, but whether you will ever be found is quite another matter."

"I shall shout for help—keep on shouting!"

"You may shout yourself hoarse; you will never be heard."

"You tell me that," panted Betty, "only to make me despair. But this place I am in—"

"It is a long way underground, my girl."

"I don't believe you," Betty cried desperately. "The air has not the dampness, the coldness, of a place far underground. Why, now I come to notice it, the air is quite warm and dry!"

"There is a reason for that," smiled Mrs. Carnay. "It has nothing to do with the under-

ground chambers being near the surface. They are not near the surface, by any means."

"Ah, then I understand!" Betty cried out excitedly. "Yes, it is all—clear to me now! The heat we girls noticed in our bedroom at night—"

"Oh, you noticed some heat up there, did you?"

"You and your husband," Betty rushed on, "you are carrying on a secret industry that requires a furnace. Down in these secret places connected with the old priory, you are working at night time."

"But you would never guess what the industry is," Mrs. Carnay rejoined lightly.

"I can guess! You are coiners—coiners!"

At last Betty had said something that was to make the smile fade from Mrs. Carnay's handsome face.

Some note of scorn and disgust in the girl's voice had told upon the woman. She seemed to shrink slightly, whilst her dark brows drew together in a frown.

In a moment she was trying to assert all her former nonchalance, but the effort was not a success.

"Well, and what if we are?"

"It is a wicked business—a thing—Oh, how any woman could take part in it!" was Betty's ringing cry of scorn. "One of the most despicable things a person can stoop to—making bad money!"

"It may be all that you are pleased to call it, but it pays, my dear—it pays!" Mrs. Carnay said, forcing a laugh.

"What about the poor people who get let in over the bad money you put about?" flashed Betty indignantly. "I only hope that you soon get caught, as you will in the long run."

"You think so, do you?"

"I am sure of it! People are saying there must be coiners in the neighbourhood. You had better look out, Mrs. Carnay. The police—"

"I am afraid my husband and I do not credit the local police with much genius as detectives," the woman broke in, maintaining the old air of disdain. "It has certainly been easy enough to carry on up till now."

"Well, my chums, then—you had better beware of them!" Betty rushed on recklessly. "I am not the only one who knows about the well."

"Perhaps not," was the cool rejoinder. "But you are the only girl who knows about the iron door? Ah, I thought so!" the woman nodded, with extreme satisfaction, as Betty failed to answer. "I was pretty sure that I had caught the only girl who mattered."

She took a sudden imperious stride towards Betty.

"And, having caught her, I mean to keep her—yes," came in an altered tone of intense ferocity from the coiner's wife. "Here you stay, my girl, with only yourself to thank for whatever you may suffer. Here you stay, until my husband has stocked himself up with coins and got the plant away. Which means—"

"Mrs. Carnay, you dare not keep me here!"

"I dare not? Ha, ha, ha!" she laughed derisively. "You will know better how much daring I have in me, my girl, before the next few days are out!"

Perhaps Betty's challenging attitude had stung the woman, for in the next instant she shot out one hand and gripped the hapless girl by the shoulder, held it so fiercely that Betty winced with pain.

"You say I dare not!" Mrs. Carnay exclaimed,

in a sudden blaze of passion. "I may dare to keep you without a light to cheer your solitude. Have a care, my girl, how you behave when I am here! I may dare to keep you without food and water—a starving prisoner in the dark!"

She paused, breathless, and took her hand from the girl's shoulder; but only to give emphasis to those cruel threats by striking that same hand across Betty's face.

"You wretch! Oh, you monster!" gasped the girl, falling back a step. "Coward, to treat me like this! But I won't stand it—I won't!"

And all in a moment she acted on the desperate impulse to make a rush for the door.

Mrs. Carnay tried to bar the way, but failed, for Betty ran wide of her. In a flash the girl was at the door, shouting "Help, help!" whilst she sought to find the means to open it.

Then the lantern was deliberately kicked over by Mrs. Carnay, plunging the vault-like prison into groping darkness again. Betty heard the ruthless woman swooping towards her through the

Paula Creel now came drifting in, looking the picture of dejection.

"Geals," she said, subsiding into a basket-chair, "it is weally too twying. Not a sowap of news after all this time, 'bai Jove!'"

"Not the least inking," rejoined Polly heavily. "And I tell you what, Paula, some of us are beginning to wonder whether we ought to keep silent any longer about that business of Myra Marshall, and the well in the shrubbery, and—"

"Yes, wather," Paula put in, nodding. "I quite wealise, geals; there is something to be said for speaking out now. Poor Betty, she was concerned with us in twying to solve that stwange mystewy."

"I am for speaking out," said Madge quietly. "Suppose we go to Miss Redgrave and tell her everything?"

"Remember this, though," Tess remarked, very gravely; "we have not the least reason for



IN HER POWER!

"Do you know why you are a prisoner?" asked Mrs. Carnay, with a mocking smile. "Because you know too much!" Betty Barton clenched her fists.

darkness, and again the two closed in a struggle.

"Help, help!" went up Betty's desperate appeal. "Help!"

But who was there to respond, and how could she ever contend successfully against an adversary of such superior height and strength?

Her cries died away despairingly at last. She lay, a moaning, exhausted figure, upon the brick floor of her prison, whilst her pitiless captor passed out into some narrow passage-way, and closed the door upon her with a dull thud.

A Clue at Last.

"POLLY, I am beginning to wonder—"

"So am I, Madge."

"And I," said Tess. "And here is Paula, so we might ask her what she thinks."

The anxious day was ending. Only a cheerless twilight filled this study where Madge and Tess had found Polly moping alone—the study which should have known Betty's bright presence this evening.

supposing that Betty has come to harm through following up that mystery. And we have one very serious thing to bear in mind."

"You mean—" came from Polly.

"If we speak out, whether what we tell has any bearing upon Betty's disappearance or not, we are going to get Myra Marshall into frightful disgrace."

"Yes, thear is that, 'bai Jove!" murmured Paula. "A vevy distwessing thing to do, 'bai Jove!"

"Babbling is always hateful," agreed Polly. "It is really awful to go to a mistress with a story that may lead to a girl being expelled. And yet—"

"It means expulsion for Myra, that is certain," said Tess. "For just think what the facts are that we shall have to disclose! We must tell the mistresses that Myra brought away from the burnt-out school a whole boxful of bad coins. She hid them down that well, and we—"

"We simply slipped out, under cover of night,

and fished the box up again," interjected Polly. "We could produce the box of coins now."

"Myra, of course, will have to explain," said Tess. "And what explanation can she give that will be satisfactory?"

"None!" declared Polly flatly.

"Quite right," said Paula, and she sighed again. "It is most distressing. The geal must have come into possession of a whole lot of those wotten coins, and must have been passing them off by degwees; bai Jove!"

Polly took a turn about the room, fuming with anxiety.

"Oh, bother!" she exclaimed at last. "If you girls say speak out, then I'll speak out with you! But—but—"

"Yes, I know," said Madge. "When one thinks of Myra's position, one feels—"

"After all," Polly stood quite still to argue desperately, "is it really possible that Betty's disappearance can have anything to do with Myra's horrid business? I can't believe it, unless—"

She paused, drawing a deep breath.

"Unless," she went on, in a tense whisper, "Myra's guilt is greater than we have thought it to be. I mean, if she has not been merely in possession of some coins that she found, but— Oh, I don't like to say it!"

"You had better say it, dear," Madge advised.

"Myra is in touch with a gang of coiners!" Polly suggested, with a gasp at the astounding nature of her remark.

"Bai Jove!" breathed Paula. "Gweat goodness! In that case—"

"Who would the coiners be?" whispered Tess.

"But I know what you are going to say, Polly. Mr. and Mrs. Carnay!"

"Yes."

For a long moment there was deep silence in

the twilight study. Then Madge—perhaps the most level-headed girl of all four—made one of her quiet suggestions.

"Supposing we wait just a little while longer before speaking out!" she proposed. "After all, we are trusting a good deal to mere theory about Mr. and Mrs. Carnay."

"Madge is right," said Tess. "Don't let us do anything that may hinder the clearing up of this mystery about Betty. At the same time, we must be careful. A serious thing, to bring charges against Mr. and Mrs. Carnay before we are in a position to prove the accusation."

"Yes, wather! We might be sent to pwison for slander!" said Paula.

"Nothing as bad as that, I fancy," smiled Madge. "But Mr. and Mrs. Carnay might very easily slip through our hands. And then—"

She broke off abruptly, listening with her chums to the sudden commotion made by several girls storming up the stairs.

"Hark! That means something—some news of Betty, I know!" exclaimed Polly. "Oh, they have found her, perhaps! They have found her!"

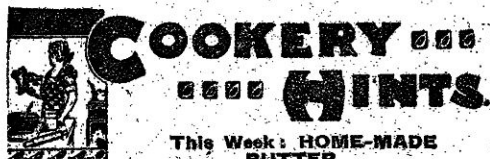
She darted to the door and whirled it open, and next moment she was crying eagerly to all the girls who came whirling round from the stairs:

"Yes, what? What is the news, then?"

"Betty's bicycle!" panted Dolly Delane, foremost in the excited throng that was surging down the corridor. "We have just this moment found it. We have found it—in the grounds!"

[END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.]

(Next week's long complete *Morocco* story is entitled "The Coiners' Captives!" The girls follow up the clue of Betty's bicycle with thrilling results. Order your copy of THE SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN at once and make sure of reading this splendid yarn.)



This Week: HOME-MADE BUTTER.

ATENTION, girls!" said Miss Grill, and at the word of command we ceased our conversations, and glanced towards Miss Grill.

Certainly her table looked different from usual. Gone were the scales, flour and all other cookery ingredients, and standing on the table was a large jug and several bottles, with large necks.

"Our lesson to-day," said Miss Grill, "is on using sour milk."

Didn't sound very interesting, I thought.

"This jug," went on Miss Grill, "contains sour milk, and from it we are going to make home-made butter."

She filled several of the bottles with the milk, covered the stoppers with clean muslin, and fixed them firmly into the bottles.

The Butter Churns.

"You will all take a turn with churning the butter," announced Miss Grill, as she fixed in the last stopper.

We glanced round, but couldn't see any churn.

"Human churns are being used for butter-making to-day," said Miss Grill, smiling a tour surprised looks. Then we understood.

We had to shake the bottles to make the butter.

And it was an arm-aching job. May shook for five minutes, and then I, and so on for half an hour.

At the end of that time we were rewarded by the sight of little bits of butter floating about in the milk.

How to Finish off the Butter.

When the butter had formed, we turned the contents of the bottle into a bowl of cold water, and with two wooden spoons patted the butter into shapes, finally washing the butter in cold water.

Why the Butter Didn't Form.

Bertha Burns and Mabel Cook, the two worst "cooks" of the class, couldn't get any butter to come.

But only because, when their arms ached just a little, they abandoned their task, and played instead of working.

Cream Cheese from Sour Milk.

Miss Grill gave as a further recipe for using sour milk.

A cream cheese is made as follows:

After the milk has gone sour, leave it for three or four days, until it is quite set.

Then put it into a muslin bag, and hang it in a position so that the "whey" can drop into a basin. The cheese should hang about 24 hours.

The cheese will then be ready, and will be very tasty for supper.

It is not necessary that sour milk should be used for making butter. Fresh milk can be used with equally good results.

DOLLY HOPE.