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ISSUE

**"The SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN MUSIC BOOK"!**

# The Schoolgirls' Own



**"PLEASE WE'VE COME TO LEARN  
MUSIC!"** (A "jape" incident from the  
long complete story of the  
girls of Morcove School contained in this issue.)

**2<sup>D</sup>**

A "Morcove" School Story is the Schoolgirls' delight!  
Read this and you'll acknowledge it is so.

## MADGE MINDEN'S SECRET!

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Madge Minden is the Musician of Morcove School and in this fine long complete story you will learn the :: :: curious use to which she puts her talent. :: ::

By **MARJORIE STANTON,**



### Such a Scream!

"WELL have a game with her!" chuckled Cora Grandways. "Such a game—you see!"

It was barely five minutes since the Fourth Form had come out of afternoon class. Out of doors some of the girls were meaning to snatch a half-hour's healthy exercise, for even at this fag end of the winter term there was light enough up to five o'clock for a bit of practice with the hockey-sticks. But Cora Grandways was in her study, glorying in the fact that she had induced several members of the Form to join her there for a bit of fun.

"Fun," that is to say, from Cora's point of view!

"It is Madge Minden I'm going to have a lark with," explained the mischief-maker of the Form. "The idea came to me when we were all in class, and I've been bursting to tell you ever since!"

"Sounds promising, that," commented Diana Forbes. "Well?"

Nor did the three or four other girls fail to share Diana's eagerness. They would not have been here if they had not been prone enough always to fall in with Cora's so-called "japing."

"What I can't get over, girls, is Madge's turning her musical talent into hard cash!" Cora said scornfully. "We know for a fact there is at least one miserable creature in the town that she is giving lessons to—"

"That horrid little step-girl, yes," interjected Mabel Rivers.

"Then listen to this!" exclaimed Cora gaily. "I vote that we all pop away and dress up as the most awful-looking guys you ever saw, and then—"

"Pretend we are Madge's music pupils from the town, eh?" tittered Ella Elgood. "Oh, my goodness! That's a good notion, yes!"

"Half a sec! You haven't quite got it yet," Cora detained them, for the whole batch of them had looked like rushing off at once to set the fun going. "One of us must stay down here, not dressed up at all. Diana, you had better be the one."

"Oh!" demurred Diana Forbes. "But why?"

"It's the cream of the whole thing," Cora said encouragingly. "You will wait until we have all assembled in the music-room, and then you'll go and fetch Madge. He, he, he! You'll tell her—Ha, ha, ha!"

"You'll tell her that several girls have come

up to the school to inquire about her giving them lessons—see?"

Diana brightened up in a moment.

"Oh, right-ho! Yes, that's all right," she agreed. "So off you go, and I'll be ready for you downstairs."

Suppressing their titters and chuckles, away raced the girls who were to do the dressing-up, Cora setting the pace by simply whirling along the corridor and up to the floor above.

That they would be able to deck themselves out in the most absurd style without being observed there was no question. At the present time the Fourth and Fifth Forms of Morcove School were quartered at the Priory, a very rambling old house, some two miles from the actual school, which had been burnt out only a few weeks ago. Forty girls or so in a house with twenty bedrooms means plenty of chance for secrecy. In a minute Cora and Co. were making their weird "toilettes" under the most favourable conditions.

Meantime, Diana Forbes had gone downstairs, making for the music-room.

It rather disconcerted her to hear some girl or other practising at the piano, for this looked like causing a hitch. But her face cleared when she entered the room and saw who the girl was.

"Hallo, Audrey!" cried Diana, feeling sure she could persuade this girl to break off from her music for the sake of the bit of fun. "How beautiful you do play, these days!"

Audrey smiled round over one shoulder, in acknowledgment of the compliment, whilst she still crashed off the brilliant piece that her deft fingers were tackling.

"You are not wanting to take a turn at the piano, are you?" she said, loud enough to be heard above the music.

"Oh, no! Go on to the finish, anyhow; then I'll explain," answered Diana.

So Audrey crashed away, her narrow shoulders writhing prettily as she swayed about, hands sweeping up and down the keyboard, or taking little leaps away from the notes. At length she paused, getting up from the stool and putting to rights wisps of hair that had become disarranged during her playing.

"Audrey dear," Diana broke out excitedly, "some of us are having a bit of fun at Madge's expense. Cora and a few others are dressing up as poor girls who want to be her pupils."

"What?"

"It will be a scream, Audrey! Hark!" Diana darted back to the doorway, then whispered glee-

fully: "Yes, here they come! Oh, Audrey, do look! Ha, ha, ha!"

Audrey was a girl full of airs and graces, and she seldom permitted herself to laugh outright. It spoiled one's charm, she felt. But she had to laugh outright now.

Into the music-room swarmed—shuffled would be a better word—Cora and the other dressed-up girls, all tittering mirthfully at the guys they had made of themselves.

Over their ordinary attire they had either put on or pinned on the most extraordinary motley of things.

Several of them looked like nothing in human nature, but Cora and Ella had, after a fashion, achieved some sort of telling effect.

Where Cora had got the things from there is no saying, but she was wearing a maid's soiled cap and apron, and her stockings fell in loose folds about the tops of a huge pair of boots with turn-up toes.

As for Ella, she had tried to "hit off" a poor girl wanting to be grand. Thus, although her borrowed boots were just as big as Cora's she was giving herself a mincing air, and was putting on and taking off a pair of black silk gloves.

"Ha, ha, ha!" Diana fairly pealed, and had to flop back into a chair to indulge her merriment to the full. "Oh, what a scream!"

"Stop it! Stop laughing, duffer!" cried Cora, with a grin. "We are ready, so cut away and do your part. You know. Tell Madge—"

"Right-ho!"  
And with the word Diana was off. Halfway up the stairs, however, she was seized with another fit of laughter, and she had to stand and hold the banister-rail for a full minute.

Then she went on again, looking more composed. Reaching the corridor on to which most of the Fourth Form studies opened, she took another moment in which to set her face quite straight, and then tapped at a certain door.

"Come in!" came the quiet response from Madge Minden.

And Diana entered.

"Madge—"  
"Well?"  
"I hope it is all right, but they are in the music-room."

"Who are 'they'?"  
"I—I thought you would be surprised," Diana said, purposely faltering in her speech. "I could hardly believe you expected them—"

"Expected whom?" Madge exclaimed, half impatiently. "Do please out with it, Diana!"

"Oh, don't jump down my throat!" protested that girl, in an aggrieved tone. "I shall begin to wish I hadn't bothered myself about them at all. But I should be sorry if their turning up like this got you into hot water, Madge. The—the fact is—"

"What?"

Madge was standing up, a tall girl, with an air of great character. In her dark eyes there seemed to slumber a spirit that it was better not to arouse.

"Several girls are here, wanting to see you about—about music lessons, I fancy," Diana said bluntly at last. "You didn't invite them to call, of course?"

"Invite them? No!" said Madge, at once striding towards the door. "But what nonsense it is!" she checked herself to say irritably. "How can any girls have had the cheek to come here—to the school?"

"It is a bit cool," smiled Diana. "You had better go down, though, and get rid of them

before Miss Masingham or some other mistress gets wind of them. I suppose one of your pupils in the town has given them your address," she finished demurely.

Madge looked as if she were on the point of exclaiming, "No, impossible!" Diana's sober expression was too much for the girl, however, and she suddenly strode off without a word, quite unable to account for the amazing announcement, and yet suspecting no jape. The girls were down below—that was certain—and the first thing to be done was to get rid of them!

So, to the huge delight of Cora and Co., those girls presently heard Madge's quick footfall sounding towards the door.

Standing in a group, well away from the door, they nudged one another, bottling up their laughter until Madge appeared. Then—

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Cora, giving the lead to the others. "'Ow do yer do, Miss Minden?"

"Good afternoon, Mehiss Mehinden!" cried Ella, acting the part of a supposed "poor girl" putting on airs. "I 'ave taken the leehiberty of calling, don't you know—"

"You pack of idiots!" Madge panted at them, standing erect just inside the doorway. "I might have known it was some foolery!"

"I persoom I may take a cheah?" drawled Ella, and she sat down, to start pulling off her gloves and putting them on again.

Some of the other dressed-up girls were simply too helpless with laughter to act any part; but Cora, like Ella, was "all there." Audrey, still in the room, remained an amused onlooker, whilst Diana Forbes simply rolled about, convulsed with laughter.

"My nime is Smif, miss," yelled Cora, giving a hitch to her servant's cap. "You must hexcuse my hintrooding on yer, but I'm that fond o' moosic, I am. 'Ow, I love it, the moosic, and I do so want to learn 'ow to ply it!"

"My nochame is Seehmkins," volunteered Ella, fingering her black gloves. "One of the noo rich, hi ham. Would it be teehaking a liberty to hask your terms?"

"When I see a pianner, 'ow I feel I could sit dahn and ply strite awy!" howled Cora, wiping her eyes with the corner of her servant's apron.  
"Ha, ha, ha!"

The girls said afterwards they had never been in such fits of laughter as they were over Cora and Ella's carrying on.

"At eighteenpence a hour, hain't it?" struck in Cora. "I understand, miss, as 'ow that's wot you charges step-girls! Now—now, miss, don't run awy! Do gimme a trile lesson, free gratis and for nothink!"

Madge had indeed turned to stride from the room; but Diana was at the door before her, meaning to detain her, if possible.

"Out of the way, Diana!" Madge said fiercely.

"Oh, but—"

"'Ere, 'ark to this! See if I can't play orl right!" yelled Cora, making a dart for the piano.

She knew that another moment would certainly see Madge outside the room, and she meant to have all the fun at that girl's expense whilst she could.

In a flash she was seated upon the piano-stool, and banging up and down the keyboard, joggng her shoulders about, and jerking her head so that the linen cap bobbed up and down comically.

"There's moosic!" she shrieked above the frightful din caused by her strumming and the others yells of laughter. "'Oo says I can't ply?"

"Garn awy! Horf it!" shouted Ella, making

a rush and pushing Cora off the stool. "You just gimme a charnst, so nah then!"

And next instant she was banging up and down the keyboard.

"It's called 'Hoanly a Step-girl,'" Ella shrieked, after a pause for breath. "Most pathetick, I call it."

And she resumed, bawling and screeching horribly:

"Hi'm hoanly a pore little stee-hep-gal,

Clee-heaning the stee-heps all day!

Hi'd lee-hove to have lee-hessons at moosic,

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

"Bravo! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Encore, Ella!"

So the japers applauded mirthfully, whilst they ringed Madge about.

"Really, Madge, I can't help laughing!" Audrey Blain came across the room to say. "Of course, it's only nonsense, so don't—"

"Next verse!" announced Ella, from the piano.

But, before she could lift up her voice again, a sound was heard like a single hand-clap.

That was Madge, as she gave Cora a stinging smack across the cheek.

Then, with a furious push at the girls in front of her, the tormented one got to the door just as it flew open in front of several scholars, who had been attracted to the spot by the extraordinary uproar.

Betty Barton, the Form captain, strode in, with Polly Linton at her side. Behind these two were Paula Creel, Tess Trelawney, Trixie Hope, Bluebell Courtney, and several more scholars, all breathless after their outdoor exercise.

#### The Dust Flies.

"WHAT'S this?" Betty asked, before her gaze had taken in the bewildering scene.

"It is what Cora and her friends call a jape," Madge said icily. "If you think it amusing, let them continue!"

And with that she walked from the room, not too much head in air, but with a dignity there was no mistaking.

"Bai Jove!" came in an amazed gasp from Paula Creel. "Haow extwemely widiculous! Corwa—Ella—you geals!"

"You know what they are supposed to be?" Diana began to explain, chuckling. "Servant-girls from the town, booking lessons at the piano from Madge!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Look here, you girls!"

"This is going too far!" cried Betty, showing anything but an inclination to laugh. "We see the meaning—"

"Yes, wather! Howevah—"

"It is all a dig at Madge Minden, because she happens to be giving lessons to some poor girl in the town. But she has been teased enough, I think—"

"Hear, hear!" cried Polly Linton. "I don't know about your having music lessons; seems to me you want a lesson of another sort!"

"Yes, wather!"

"Then let's jolly well give it them!" proposed headstrong Polly, ever ready for a rough and tumble.

Whereupon she sailed in amongst Cora and Co. Nor were Betty and the rest of the newcomers slow at following Polly's example.

Within the next few moments that music-room became more like the ground around a football goal during a "scrum."

Dust flew up; and into the dusty air whirled fragments of Cora and Co.'s "make-up"—the servant's cap and apron, the black gloves and the bits of shawl, to say nothing of a few battered bonnets.

Not until Cora was all asprawl on the floor, with one boot on and the other off, and Ella was tumbling on top of her, did the scrimmage end. By that time, however, the remaining japers had had enough, even if they were not hors de combat. They scattered.

"What you have got to get into your noddles is this," Polly now cried to Cora and Ella. "We went for you just then, not so much because you were teasing Madge, but because you were making game of girls who have to earn their living!"



**HER PATRONAGE!** "Have you change for half-a-crown, Madge?" asked Audrey, as though paying a grocer or a baker. But Madge received the money for the music lesson with perfect calmness.

"Pwecisely! Heah, heah! Bai Jove!" agreed Paula, busy putting her hair to rights, and a murmur of approval came from the other girls.

"Just because a girl wears a cap and apron, it doesn't follow that she drops all her aitches either," said Betty indignantly. "You are starting a lot more of the snobbery that we got stamped out of Morcove terms ago—and we will stamp it out again!"

"Yes, wather! Pway wemember, geals—"

"Oh, you talk to your grandmother!" Cora snapped vulgarly at Paula. "There was never a greater snob than you at one time!"

"I quite agwee, Corwa. Howevah—"

But Paula was not given a chance to describe the various happenings by which she

had been led into becoming a "downright demow-crat," as she proudly termed herself to-day.

Corá and Ella stormed off, noses in air, and the incident closed, if only because there was tea in study for the girls to think about now.

#### What They Did Not Know.

"S HALL we ask Madge to join us?" was Betty's sudden remark, when the cloth was laid in that comfortable den which she shared with Polly.

From the depths of an armchair which Paula Creel—more often in this study than her own—had dropped into five minutes ago, there came a hearty:

"Yes, wather!"

"Oh, I don't know!" sighed Polly, slamming the tea-caddy on the table. "You know how I feel about Madge—sort of wild with her—"

"Pweicely, Polly deah!"

"And yet—" said Betty.

"And yet—well, there it is; she's Madge—our Madge still, I suppose. Bother her!" Polly said, rather inconsequentially. "Bother the music; I say! Why can't girls be sensible?"

"Pweic—" began Paula; but Polly looked at her with that sort of glance which boded remarks ending in "wuffed" hair.

"You don't call yourself sensible, do you, Paula?"

"Er—no, wather not!" Paula thought it advisable to admit. "Wather the weverse, in fact! Howevah—"

"If you and Madge were put in a bag and shaken up together, some good might result," said Polly. "Madge, living her life thirty-six hours to the day, so to speak. Taking on pupils, unbeknown to the mistresses, and then offering to teach the singing-class because the music-mistress is called away! As for you—you great lump of indolence—"

"Polly deah!"

"I'm cross!" said Polly. "Who wouldn't be cross? What with Madge taking in pupils—"

"Oh, don't begin again!" groaned Betty.

"Let's have her in to tea, and—and—"

"Bother the pupils, yes!" suggested Polly.

"I wish one could!"

"Pway wemember," ventured Paula, "some of the pupils are geals in the school! Audwey, for instance. Audwey is getting Madge to give her special lessons on account of the festival."

Betty had slipped away to find Madge. In a moment she was back.

"Not there!" she announced. "I suppose she has gone down to tea at the school tables."

"Either that," mumbled Polly, "or else she is going without tea to rattle away at the joanner—tumpy, umpty, iddle, ee-dee! Some symphony thing or other. Ugh!"

But she and Betty were both wrong in their conjectures. Madge was neither down at the school tea-tables nor at the piano in the music-room.

When she walked away from that derisive scene in the music-room, she had felt she must go somewhere to be quite alone.

Her study—how could she be sure of privacy even there? At any moment the mockers might think it funny to burst in upon her again. And if they did, she would lose her temper with a vengeance at last, and violent things would happen!

Oh, but they were trying her hardly, these days! So she was thinking to herself fiercely, as she now roamed about out of doors. It would be

dark soon; already a chilly twilight was falling upon the woodland world in which the Priory and its spacious grounds were set. She felt that she would still want to stay out even then, however. This was best—this was a little relief to her tired spirit, to be out of doors.

Their abominable sneers and jeers at her little pupil in the town—the pupil they thought she was taking money from; although all question of payment for the lessons had been wiped out from the start—that was what maddened her.

Poor Maggie Shaw, just the very opposite from the untidy, coarse-speaking sort of girl that Corá and the rest made her out to be! Always so neat and clean, always so well-spoken—Maggie Shaw, with no mother to see after her upbringing lovingly; no brothers and sisters to look to. Only a father who had set his steps upon the path of the transgressor—a man who Madge had good reason to suspect was a criminal.

To and fro in the twilight grounds Madge roamed, raging against Corá and the others because, when they carried out their mocking "jape," they had hurt, not her own pride, but her tender pity for little Maggie.

Her mind went back to the mean home of the poor girl, which she had visited once; kept all so neat and clean by that busy pair of hands, whilst the girl herself little knew what a sinister career it was that her father almost certainly followed in secret.

Little she knew, poor child, what was in the lumber-room upstairs that her father always kept locked, never allowing her to see into it for a moment!

Yes, there in that locked room at Maggie's home, most likely, there were to-day some of the things that had been looted from the school safe; things that the headmistress and the whole school would never cease to mourn the loss of—silver cups and other trophies, priceless in the eyes of the school that had proudly won them, but to whoever had them now only so much "stuff" for melting down by a receiver of stolen property.

"I feel certain Maggie's father has them. Oh, if only I could get back the school's things without ever saying who took them!" was Madge's desperate thought, as she turned again on a shrubby path.

That, too, was a thing she had said to herself scores of times since the awful moment when she discovered who the culprit was. She longed—how she longed, as a girl proud of the school's attainments, to see those trophies restored!

Was it a wonder, however, that she wanted even more to spare poor Maggie the shame and horror of knowing what her father was! And so, to get back the trophies whilst sparing the father for the girl's dear sake, that was indeed the one thing to do—get them back somehow, oneself. Ah, if only one could!

"But how?" she began to rack her brains again. "Even if I go to Maggie's home, she—"

Some significant sound close at hand in the twilight grounds suddenly startled the distracted girl. Not far from where she was pacing to and fro with a quiet step, two people seemed to have paused on their way towards the schoolhouse. They were talking in lowered tones, as if arranging some plan of action before going another step.

But the talk was not so secret as to be confined to a whisper, and all in a moment Madge heard one phrase quite clearly. Not only that, she recognised the voice

Maggie!

Then the gruffer voice of her companion sounded, and Madge recognised that, too, instantly.

Maggie's father, here in the school grounds; here, in the falling darkness, apparently unknown to anybody!

What did it mean? Madge wondered with a leaping heart.

#### The Girl Who Listened.

IT took Madge hardly a moment to decide what to do.

With a very audible step, she set off along the winding shrubby path, to disclose herself to the father and child.

That the sound of her step startled them, she knew in a moment. Their talk broke off, and was then resumed in a more guarded manner. She thought she heard Maggie saying:

"I'll see who it is, dad, if you would rather not be seen!"

Then the schoolgirl heard certain very significant sounds. The father had evidently made off through the shrubbery, rustling the bushes as he pressed his way amongst them.

His conduct, at least, was highly suspicious, and Madge felt as sick at heart as ever in her anxiety for the girl. She hastened on, and all in a moment she was face to face with Maggie at another bend in the path.

"Maggie!"

"Oh!" was all that girl could exclaim at first. But it would be wrong to say that she looked taken aback. There was as much delight as surprise in her eyes as they recognised Madge.

"Just fancy, miss—finding you out here in the grounds! Then I needn't go up to the house, and—and I'm so glad, because I didn't half like the idea—"

"Is that why you are here, Maggie?" broke out Madge eagerly. "Only to get a word with me?"

"Why, of course, miss!" was the perfectly frank answer, delivered with that adoring look which Maggie always had for her schoolgirl friend. "You couldn't suppose that I was coming to school at the Priory, could you?" she added, with a little laugh.

"No—poor Maggie! Your school days are all over, aren't they? But—but—oh, I don't know! Your father is with you—"

"He came with me—yes, miss. I wish I could call to him, but somehow he—he doesn't want to meet anybody. He just offered to walk with me here and back again."

As Maggie put it, the whole thing sounded perfectly simple—a most natural thing for a father to offer to do, to attend his little girl out of the town and home again. And yet—had he his own sinister reason for coming with the girl to the Priory?

That question presented itself to Madge even whilst she was listening to Maggie's simple words; and in a flash an answer suggested itself.

The father had come because it meant a chance for him to hunt about in these twilight grounds!

"Miss," broke out Maggie shyly, "I do hope you are not cross with me for having come up to the school to see you?"

"No, Maggie!"

It was perfectly true—Madge was not cross. Oh, how could one ever be cross with this splendid little soul? But she felt rather dismayed at finding that the child had meant to present herself at the house porch and ask for one of the scholars.

"I don't suppose they like you girls to have

anything to do with ones like me?" Maggie resumed gently. "I thought of that, miss, and I was ready to explain, if anybody seemed angry, that it was all your kindness."

"But, Maggie dear—"

"Then no one could be angry with you, could they?" the girl exclaimed, tilting up her pretty face to meet Madge's gentle gaze. "If I told them how you had taken an interest in me, because I'm so fond of music, and were giving me lessons, and—"

"How are you getting on at the music, dear?" Madge broke in, feeling it was better not to discuss the awkward position she was in. "Do you go every day to Miss Ainley's house to have the use of her piano?"

"Yes, miss; every day I have been since you gave me my last lesson," Maggie said enthusiastically. "But I sha'n't be going any more—"

"Oh!"

"I sha'n't need to," the girl ran on cheerily, "because—and this is just what I wanted to tell you about, miss, please!—dad and I are going to look after a house on the moors, outside Barncombe, until it gets let, partly furnished. I'm to do the cleaning, and keep it all nice for the owner, and father will do the garden; and there's a piano, miss—oh, a lovely piano—"

"How splendid, Maggie!"

"Ah, I knew you would say so," exclaimed the spirited little thing. "Yes, there is a lovely piano, and I may play it as much as I like; because the lady who owns the house found I could play a little, and she said she was sure I wouldn't spoil the tone."

"I don't think you would ever spoil the tone of any piano," Madge agreed, thinking of the girl's marvellous touch. "Well, this is great news, Maggie. And it means, of course, that I can come there to give you your finishing lessons?"

"Yes, miss, if—if you still want to come."

"Maggie, you funny little darling! Want to come! I wish I could come twice a day, dear, between now and the festival! Still, you will be all right, I am certain, for that prize which is open to all comers."

Maggie's look of disbelief blended with a wistful expression that showed how she longed to win that prize—a gold medal and diploma, and twenty pounds!

"You say that, miss; but, oh, there must be girls at this school of yours who will beat me!"

"I say it, Maggie dear, because I am sure it is the case. We have only one girl who is taking the Lady Lundy prize seriously—a girl named Audrey Blain—"

Madge paused. She had given a slight start as she heard some foliage rather close at hand rustling. But she tried to ignore the sound, remembering that Maggie's father was loitering around.

"Audrey Blain is a girl who plays beautifully, I expect?" said Maggie.

"Yes; but you will take the prize—and it is only right you should!" Madge said. "I don't bear Audrey Blain any ill-will at all; but she is a girl to whom twenty pounds is nothing, whilst you—"

"I—I know, miss," Maggie said falteringly, confessing her longing for the prize. "It would be such a help—twenty pounds. Still, I only want to win if I can win on merit."

"You will either win on merit or not at all, dear," Madge rejoined. "They can't take the entrants' conditions of life into account."



**CORA AND HER "SET"!** "There they jeered as Madge rode away. "Off to make money out of poor servant girls!" she goes!"

It had grown much darker by now. Lights were springing up in the schoolhouse, and Madge, when she glanced at her wrist-watch, had to hold it very close to see the time. And it was like Maggie to say at once:

"Don't let me hinder you, please. The house where I shall be with father is called Moorland Lodge, if—if you can give me some more lessons, and can come that distance."

"I'll manage it easily on the bike," Madge assured her. "Ta-ta, then, dear! I am awfully glad you are going to be out there on the moors for a little while."

She bent and kissed the girl, and so they parted again, Maggie saying cheerfully, as she turned to go:

"Father's round about, I know, so I shall soon find him!"

Madge had not gone twenty paces towards the schoolhouse before she paused to listen. The father—could his whereabouts be traced by the ear? Yes; Madge could hear him, and it was all exactly as she had guessed.

He was prowling up and down another shrubby path—the very one along which someone had fled on the night of the burglary. Haunting the very spot where she had found that clue, since destroyed!

It brought the whole unhappy situation back into Madge's mind again, and she sighed heavily as she resumed her own cautious steps. Poor Maggie, she did not know—had no idea!

But now, what was this that Madge herself did not know, as she left the shrubbery?

It was that she and Maggie had been spied upon—listened to!

For a full minute after the two girls had quitted

their meeting-place, it remained silent and as deserted as any other part of the garden usually was at this evening hour. Then, suddenly, some evergreen foliage rustled, and a figure stole forth into the open.

Audrey Blain!

She it was who took her stand at the exact spot where the two girls had been talking. It was obvious that she felt the need of waiting a little while longer before going on after Madge into the house. In the way she glanced about her, trying all the time not to make a sound, there was enough to show that she did not mean anyone to know that she had played eavesdropper.

This beautiful girl, child of very wealthy parents, had her faults and weaknesses, some of them had enough, too. But she was not given to prying, and she felt really ashamed at having stood and listened, instead of disclosing herself. She found a good deal of excuse for herself, also, in the fact that it was quite by accident that she had become an eavesdropper.

She had, indeed, come out into the twilight grounds with the intention of throwing herself in the way of Madge, knowing that that girl was out here feeling upset. Then that girl and her father had turned up; and all through hesitating to disclose herself before the talk started, she—Audrey—had felt bound to remain quiet.

At first she had felt that her being there, an unobserved listener, did not matter a scrap. It would be a lot of talk that would not concern her in the least. But it had concerned her—yes! She knew a thing now that was going to cause her great alarm.

She knew that Madge's step-girl music-pupil was going to compete for the Lady Lundy prize at the festival—more, that it was Madge's belief the girl would win the prize!

Treading warily along the path to the schoolhouse at last, Audrey pondered this revelation with the gravest misgivings.

"Is it really possible that the girl—a mere slut—can play so wonderfully? Madge is a good judge, of course. But—but perhaps Madge was only praising the girl to encourage her?"

That idea would not hold water at all, Audrey had to realise that Madge was passionately sincere as a teacher and a critic. However much she might pity the step-girl, she would never let pity make her say extravagant things about her playing.

"She must be very clever, then—a regular genius," was all Audrey could conclude jealously. "And she will be there on the great day, unless—unless something happens."

She came to another stop as she added those words to comfort herself:

"Unless something happens."

In the deepening darkness she slowly turned about and looked in the direction in which Maggie must have gone.

"I wish—I wish something could happen!" Audrey was thinking then. "Why should she be allowed to win the prize—a girl like that?"

#### The House on the Moor.

**A**FTER school on the following Friday afternoon, Betty Barton stopped Madge Minden just outside the music-room.

"Is it any good counting upon you for to-morrow's hockey match, Madge?"

"I am afraid not, Betty," was the reply. "I really have no time for hockey this side of the festival."

"Which means, until after next Wednesday,"

said Betty. "Thank goodness, our day at the musical festival comes off then! One ought not to say so, I suppose, but I shall be glad when it's over!"

"Won't you be very glad, for the school's sake, Betty, if the choir makes a hit?"

"Why, of course! Oh, yes!" Betty exclaimed, with unmistakable zeal for the school's good name. "In that sense, I am simply longing for the day. Only, music isn't everything, Madge!"

"Neither is hockey!" smiled that girl.

"No. The thing is, I suppose, to be moderate in all things," Betty pondered aloud. "Well, I am keen on sport—mad on it, perhaps. But I did join the choir, didn't I?"

"You did, Betty. And I—I am keen on music—mad on making it pay, just at present. And I have not joined you on the hockey field, just lately. Oh, I am a terrible person, I know."

"You are—what Polly is always saying, dear—just our Madge still," came with great tenderness from Betty. "That is why we feel it more than the girls who are everlastingly taunting and jeering—your throwing up everything, Madge—everything for the sake of music, and making it pay!"

"Well—"

Madge hesitated. Not for the first time she was yearning to confide everything to Betty. Should she do that? Yes—no! Oh, everything had got much too complicated! Once begin, and it would end in one's letting Betty, Polly, and others share all the miserable anxiety about Maggie's thieving father!

"I—I'm sorry, Betty; I— It is no use arguing," the perplexed girl broke out helplessly.

And next moment she was alone in the music-room, with the knowledge that Betty had surely gone on up to her study feeling rebuffed again—hurt.

Audrey Blain came in to Madge in another minute to have one of the lessons "as per contract." She played through the piece she intended to render at the festival contest for girl pianists; then patiently played it through a second time, after hearing Madge's comments.

"Yes, that was better—much better!" Madge said, at the finish of the second rehearsal. "You won't be far behind the prize-winner."

Then Audrey turned on the music-stool and looked her schoolgirl-instructress steadily in the eyes.

"You are hinting, Madge, that I shall not be the prize-winner?"

"I was telling you there is room for improvement yet. You take those lites on the second page like this," Madge said, fingering off some notes quickly with her right hand. "You still want to get them more like this—staccato, see?"

And she played them as they were certainly intended by the composer to be played.

"Very well, I'll remember—more like that," Audrey said, rather wearily. "But, even then, Madge, why don't you say, straight out, you know of someone who will beat me, even if you don't beat me yourself?"

"I—I shall not compete," said Madge simply.

"What?"

"No; I meant to, but my having given lessons for payment has disqualified me. In any case, I would not want to stand in the way of another girl."

"Oh! One of the famous pupils!" Audrey said, with her disdainful smile.

"There is only the one pupil, outside the school, Audrey—"

"And it is she—the stop-girl! And so it amounts to this—a Morcove scholar has been doing all she can to get Morcove girls defeated!"

"I don't think that is a fair view to take," Madge demurred. "I have taken just as much pains over you as over the outside girl. If she wins, it will be because she really has the greater talent; if you win, you will have all the more to be proud of, because you will have beaten at least one brilliant rival."

"I see!" Audrey said drily. "I don't say I agree with you, Madge. I don't think the school will agree with you, if that girl does win. But never mind; we don't want to fall out. Have you change for half a crown?"

It was delicious, Audrey felt, being able to put that question as one tendered the coin, as if one were paying the grocer or the baker!

On the other hand, it was maddening to see how compositely Madge took payment for the lesson.

"You'll do well to practise a lot between now and Wednesday," Madge advised, as they were ready to separate. "The other girl will be doing that, I know."

"Will she be having extra lessons? If so," Audrey said, starting to walk away, "I should think she will be pretty well broke—at eighteen-pence an hour. But there is the twenty pounds—she can always pay you out of that, of course!"

Madge took this as calmly as the rest—that is to say, outwardly she was quite unruffled; inwardly, however, she seethed with disgust. Oh, if only one could have refused to take on girls like Audrey at any price! But, if she had picked and chosen her pupils, how many names would she really have been able to write down in her little account-book upstairs, with the amounts paid set against each name? Hardly one! And so that would have been the humiliating end to



**STOLEN PROPERTY!** Madge lifted up the cover and there were the vanished trophies of Morcove School!



her daring experiment—the venture begun half in play, but it had turned out how serious a business altogether! She would have had to admit to her father that he was right and she was wrong. Music, as a profession, was a poor crutch to lean upon in time of need.

But there were those names in the little account-book upstairs—a whole list of pupils for him to see, when she went home at the end of the term! So, never mind how much pride she had had to swallow; the great thing was, she really had earned money—yes, quite a lot—by teaching music!

Next day—Saturday—she set off as soon as possible after dinner to get to Moorland Lodge on her bicycle.

Some of the Grandways "set" saw her ride away, and they did not fail to jeer.

"Off again!"

"Yes, she's off to earn another eighteenpence!"

"How I wish I could make money out of poor servant girls!"

"Poor things! It's daylight robbery, taking their hard-earned coppers!"

And so on, until Madge's whirring pedals had put her beyond reach of the mocking pack.

It was a bright afternoon, and for her to be cycling out on to the open moorland roads, instead of making for Barncombe's back streets, was enough to set her thinking once again of the treat Maggie had come in for. A bit of good luck for her, indeed, this change from the slum part of the pent-up provincial town to a fine big house out on the breezy moors!

Nor had the good-natured schoolgirl been five minutes with her little protégé, at the house on the moor, before she began to talk in that cheering strain.

They were in the kitchen then, for Maggie had hardly expected the schoolgirl so soon, and had been caught cleaning up a whole collection of brasses. Now she was finished, and was making herself spic-and-span before going to the piano in the drawing-room.

"Yes, it's a gorgeous position—such wonderful air, and nothing to shut out the sunshine," Madge exclaimed, gazing out from the kitchen window. "And do you know what I believe will happen in the end, Maggie, darling?"

She turned to smile upon Maggie, who was untying her coarse apron.

"The place will let, and the mistress of the house will want to keep you on, dear—that is, if you want to be kept on!"

"Oh, miss—"

"There's no knowing, Maggie dear; you may have won the prize by that time, and Lady Lundy may have taken you up, to make a great musician of you."

"The things you do say, miss!" exclaimed Maggie, her eyes a-sparkle. "But what about father, if some lady really should want to keep me on as a proper servant? I—I wonder how father would manage without me?"

And then Madge felt all the old heaviness of heart. What about father? Yes, indeed, one might well say that! Oh, dear, how terribly worrying it was!

"Father's gone into Barncombe again, to get a few more things from home," Maggie remarked serenely. "There are lots of rooms upstairs quite empty, and he's using one for storing things."

She added in a moment:

"Perhaps I oughtn't to have told you that;

he said it was best not to tell anyone, because the lady who owns the house might not like him to make free with it. But you—you know father is quite all right, and you wouldn't repeat anything to make trouble, I'm sure!"

"No, dear," Madge had to say, with forced composure. "I shall not talk."

She drifted about the kitchen for a few seconds, and then, noticing that Maggie had just a few more things to do, she yielded to a sudden daring impulse.

"Maggie, darling, I can have a look over the house, can't I, whilst I am waiting for you? It is such a fine place, and the views from upstairs—"

"Oh, yes, miss; they're wonderful! Do go and see!" urged the girl.

Madge was gone in a moment. Through a hall that had been denuded, like most of the rooms, of all valuable furniture, and up a broad staircase she went, pausing at a landing window to glance out.

Even from this first-floor window the panorama that lay spread before her eyes was a most majestic one; but it could not hold her there, nor did she go higher up for the purpose of gaining an even more extensive view.

She wanted to find the room that Maggie's father was doubtless keeping locked, as he had kept that room locked at home.

Right at the top of the house she paused to listen for Maggie's movements about the place below. The busy hands were clattering teacups now, getting tea laid for her father, against his return by and by. And over this happy task Maggie was singing softly to herself. Poor Maggie! Ah, poor child, who would ever hear her singing so blithely if she learned the dreadful truth?

Up here were the attic bedrooms—likeliest of all places that the uneasy man had chosen for hiding his ill-gotten gains. Madge went to the first door she came to, and the fact that it opened to her touch was enough. She hardly troubled to look inside.

Another room was just the same—the door unlocked, the chamber itself quite bare. But a third door, round the landing corner—that was locked!

In a flash Madge was kneeling down to try and look through the keyhole, but it was covered on the inner side.

She stood erect, her heart beating rapidly. She must get into the room somehow—she must! The school's stolen trophies might be there, and to think of missing this chance of getting them back! But how—how to get past the locked door?

An idea came to her that seemed to promise little hope of success, but she put it to use. Stealthily she crept away to find the keys of other doors in the upper part of the house. There was no knowing; sometimes one key did fit the lock of another door.

In a minute she was back at the attic-door with a whole half-dozen keys. Excitedly she fitted in the first. No use! Another, and another after that. Still no success.

A pang of despair went through her. Not one of the keys was going to act. Maggie's father had perhaps taken care to assure himself that he had in his pocket the one key that would—

Ah!

Wonderful luck, after all! The very last key had turned in the rusty wards; the door was swinging open—she was free to enter!

**The Burglar's Loot.**

WITH an excited stride she was across the threshold, gazing about the tiny chamber. It had a sloping roof, with a skylight instead of a window. On the floor were dumped heaps of stuff, artfully concealed beneath sacks, old blankets, and other deceptive wrappings.

Any unsuspecting person, getting a glimpse of the room in its present state, would never have believed there could be anything valuable here—only the merest lumber. But Madge—she knew better.

She crossed over to one heap of stuff in a corner, knelt down, and dragged away a portion of the wrappings.

Silver! Candlesticks and other silver articles, beyond all doubt the proceeds of some daring burglary.

She tucked back the wrappings just as she had found them, and went to another covered heap. Again her trembling hand stripped away the dirty rags that made the pile look like mere old lumber. And there—there were the school's stolen trophies!

It was the most thrilling moment Madge had ever known.

She felt triumphant; at the same time, she knew only too well that to have found the things was not everything. They were here, for her to handle; but how to get them away, unbeknown to Maggie? Unbeknown to Maggie's own father,

There was no hitch, anyhow. On the ground floor she had only to step a yard or so from the foot of the staircase to reach a door opening on to the garden. A moment, and she was in the outer air, flitting along a screened path towards her bicycle.

She never stopped to make the bundle fast to the machine, but simply dumped it half into the little basket at the handlebars, and then went back to the house.

When she rejoined Maggie, a minute later, she was able to feel quite sure that that girl had not been the least puzzled to know what she was up to.

Nor, indeed, had Maggie seen anything of the whole stealthy performance.

Who was this, however, lurking in the lodge garden, who must certainly have seen Madge steal forth with that queer-looking bundle for the bicycle—a girl who was now prowling towards what she guessed was the drawing-room of the house?

Audrey Blain again!

Somewhere amongst the furze bushes on the moorland, Audrey had concealed her own cycle a few minutes since. For, on her machine, she also had set off for this moorland house after dinner, burning with a desire to hear how Madge's poor pupil really did play the piano.

For hours last night Audrey had lain awake, a prey to feelings of miserable dismay over her

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too, if he should suddenly return, as he might do at any instant!

Getting up off her knees, she stole out of the room, and prowled about the upper part of the house. She found what she wanted—a second staircase, leading down through the house, for the use of the domestics.

If she could smuggle the stolen trophies down there and out into the garden, then—her bicycle was at hand, and she could easily manage the load. It would be rather a bulky one, but very light.

Back to the burglar's store-place she crept, and the next few moments saw her rapidly putting the things together in a bundle. She found an old newspaper, and by wrapping each article in this, she prevented the various pieces from jingling against one another.

At last the bundle was ready, and now she took care to do a needful thing.

To the heap of stuff from which she had retrieved the trophies she added sufficient oddsands to swell it to its former dimensions. Then she carefully replaced the rags, so that Maggie's father, unless he actually looked beneath the coverings, would never dream that some of his loot had been abstracted.

Relocking the door and taking the key away, Madge crept off down the side staircase with her bundle of "swag." She wanted to take a moment between every cautious step, but dare not. It was absolutely necessary to get back to Maggie at once.

prospects for the festival. Was the girl Maggie such a serious rival, after all? According to Madge, she was; and Madge ought to know. With something akin to the desperation of despair, however, Audrey had begun to tell herself that Madge might be biassed for once. An easy thing, anyhow, to ride out to Moorland Lodge and give ear oneself to Maggie's playing. Why not do it then?

Hence the reason for Audrey's turning up in secret like this, at an hour when she knew Maggie would be rehearsing her festival piece, under Madge's tuition.

She had been a little surprised to see Madge come out of the house with that bundle just now; but the surprise had not lasted long. For it had occurred to Audrey at once that most likely Madge had merely bought some rubbish off the poor girl, out of common charity. In any case, the envious entrant for the Lady Lundy prize would certainly have forgotten all about the bundle as soon as she heard Maggie start playing.

Crouching close to the drawing-room window, Audrey was listening now.

Wonderful playing! With all the rage and bitterness of jealousy, she had to realise that it was perfectly marvellous, the music she was listening to. In spite of its coming to her through a closed window, she could tell the high quality of it, the wonderful touch that was Maggie's, her mastery of all technique.

"Little cat—oh, the horrid little cat!" Audrey

fumed savagely, whilst her eyes glistened. "It is true, then! I stand no chance whatever, unless—unless something happens to prevent her being at the festival!"

And, by and by, when she was riding back along the breezy moorland road, her thoughts still ran on in that dangerous current.

No hope for her, unless Maggie Shaw was prevented from attending the contest! What, then, could she—Audrey—do to be rid of such a rival?

Was there nothing—nothing one could do to prevent that girl from winning the prize, and all the glory that it meant?

"I must think," Audrey said again to herself. desperately, as she whirred along—"I must think what I can do!"

#### Behind Belief!

IT was half-past four. The Fourth Form's fine hockey match against a visiting team had ended a short while since, and now the hall inside the house was teeming with excited girls. The place was a babel of talk.

No wonder either!

For there, set out upon the top of a great oak chest that had been bare earlier in the afternoon, were the school's stolen trophies!

The stolen cups, the stolen gold and silver medals—every one of the treasures that had been looted from the safe, more than a fortnight ago, they were here for all to see!

## NEXT WEEK'S COVER

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"Betty," Polly fairly shrieked, as she saw the Form captain and other chums coming in at the porch—"Paula—Tess—look!"

Were they dreaming? That, perhaps, was what Betty and Co. wondered in the first moment when their gaze fell upon the glittering array.

Amazing thing—unaccountable!

Such was the gist of all the excited cries that continued to fill the air. Mistresses came hurrying to the spot, and they, too, were just as delighted, just as astounded, bewildered.

"Our cups, medals—everything except the money that was taken from the safe, and that doesn't matter a scrap!" Miss Massingham could be heard exclaiming, amidst the general din. "But who has restored them like this? Where have they been all this time? Where were they found?"

Questions, these, that Betty and the rest of the girls could only echo—not answer.

"Somebody must know something about this!" Miss Massingham exclaimed at last, with a smile that showed she would have only praise for any girl who could throw light on the mystery. "Which of you, then, has achieved this triumph—for a triumph it is?"

No one answered, and after a moment the mistress let her smile broaden.

"Don't be afraid, any of you," she said. "Even if one of you has been doing some rather daring bit of detective work it is not going to result in a lecture."

"Hear, hear!"

"Then who recovered the stolen property?" repeated the mistress. "Answer, please!"

And still there was silence.

Ignoring those girls who, she knew, had been on the sports ground all the afternoon, she began to question those who had been out for rambles or cycle rides. At last she came to Audrey Blain.

"Well, Audrey, you did not bring in all these trophies."

"No, Miss Massingham. I wish I could claim the credit, but I can't!"

"You, then, Madge? You went for a ride—"

"Yes, I"—Madge's very colour was giving her away—"I found the things."

A tremendous "Oh!" went up. Then:

"Bravo, Madge!" led off Betty. "Bravo—"

"Hear, hear!" sang out Polly. "Cheers for —"

"Yes, wather! Bai Jove, goals, just fancy—"

"Hip, hip—"

"One moment!" pleaded Miss Massingham, half-laughing. "But you are very reticent, Madge! You found the things—where?"

"At some place on the moor."

"Ah, of course! Merely dumped there by the thief, who had become afraid of keeping them."

She said no more, but turned again to feast delighted eyes upon the restored trophies. Around her pressed most of the girls, just as eager to gaze upon treasures which they had feared were lost to them and the dear old school for ever.

But Betty, for one, went up to Madge, and rested a hand upon her shoulder.

"Oh, it is fine—splendid of you, Madge! Now, do say you'll come to tea in a minute!"

"Did you win the hockey match?" Madge asked.

"Yes!"

"Bai Jove, wather! A cwashing twiump, Madge deah!"

"I'm glad. I—"

"Then, Madge, come along!" cried Betty, pulling her towards the stairs. "You must have tea

with us! And the first person who starts talking about music lessons and festivals, I shall put outside the room!"

"No, you won't!" declared Polly. "I reserve that job for myself! So look out for yourself, Paula!"

"My deah Polly," beamed the aristocrat of the Form, drifting with them towards the stairs, "don't you realise that I'm simply longing to wefwain from all talk about that distressing topic? Oh, gae, this is going to be like old times again, what?"

So they all hoped, as they kept Madge amongst them on the way up to the studies. In the corridor, however, what did Madge suddenly do but disengage herself from the hands that would have drawn her into the captain's study.

"No, Betty—no, Polly!" she said, rather huskily. "It is awfully good of you; but—not now. I—I've had rather a trying afternoon."

Nor could they coax her into keeping them company over the teacups. She went to her own

"She's a queer girl, Madge, and no mistake!" A very worried girl, Betty would have said, could she have had a glimpse of Madge at that moment, all alone in her study.

What to do next? That was the distracting question.

All very well to have got the stolen cups and medals back to the school without being seen, and without little Maggie knowing anything about that raid on her father's lair. But the trouble was far from being at an end.

Was it right to keep silent as to who the burglar was, leaving him still at large, still able to commit other felonies? That was the point!

Interrupting Madge's anxious pondering, there came a tap at the door, and Audrey showed herself.

"So you found those trophies out on the moor, Madge?"

"You heard me say so once!"

"Oh, yes! What I did not hear you say," Audrey retorted sweetly, "was that there are



**"LOOK!"** Polly Linton simply yelled the word—and little wonder. There, set out on the top of an old oak chest, were the school's stolen trophies. Cups, shields and medals—all were there in glittering array.

study, causing the girls to withdraw to the captain's with very glum faces.

"It's the music again!" flared up Polly. "Chasing after girls who have nothing whatever to do with the school, to give them lessons! Dash the music, I say!"

"Yes, wa—"

"You keep quiet, Paula!" Polly warned that amiable girl grimly. "I'm not in the mood for your fatuous talk! I—I'm fed up, I am!"

"My deah Polly," said Paula, sinking into her favourite armchair, "I merely wished to express my full agreement with your sentiments. I—"

"Be quiet, Paula! I tell you—"

"Pwecisely! Howeverah—"

Polly—largely pretending to be furious, of course—caught up a cushion and hurled it.

"Perhaps that will keep you quiet, duffer!"

And it did.

At any rate, there was only one remark to break the silence during the next minute or so, and that came from Betty.

houses scattered about on the moor, and that you have been to one of them this afternoon!"

Then she was gone, closing the door sharply, and Madge, who had half-started from her chair when the significant words were spoken, remained in that attitude of sudden wild alarm.

She wanted to rush out after Audrey and carry the talk a step farther, but she dared not.

She wanted to know—had Audrey seen her bringing the trophies away from that house, or was it only a shot at a venture?

She wanted to know how much Audrey knew now—and she dared not ask her.

Audrey—Maggie's rival for the Lady Lundy prize!

[END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.]

(What does Audrey intend to do? You will want to know this, so don't fail to read next week's splendid long complete Morcovoe story, entitled "A Schoolgirl's Treachery!" Order your copy of THE SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN at once and make certain of securing it.)