

← PART THREE →

WE LEARN SOME 
 INTERESTING THINGS



1

On Wednesday morning, Miss Bell was (of course) still missing, and everyone was still very excited about the idea of a gang from the East. Lallie Thompson-Bates, a day girl from the second form, was telling anyone who would listen that her mother had spoken to a close friend who had seen a woman looking very much like Miss Bell in a shop in Abingdon, buying azaleas. Another girl who knew all about the language of flowers said that azaleas meant 'Take care!', and there was great excitement at that – until Lallie admitted that she had meant to say hydrangeas. Since hydrangeas turned out to mean

'frigidity', this did not seem right at all.

'And I don't know when she would have time for buying flowers if she was really on the run from a criminal gang,' Daisy whispered to me scornfully, before turning to Kitty to discuss whether the people after Miss Bell might perhaps be from Russia.

Daisy cultivates girls in the lower forms to bring her back gossip, and so she sent Betsy North and her other informants off to collect information, telling them quite truthfully that she wanted to know what Miss Bell had been doing on Monday before her mysterious disappearance. She and I canvassed the older girls.

We discovered that, while it was difficult to stop people talking about Miss Bell, most of the things they said were utterly useless. But then Betsy came back to us with some much more useful news.

One of Betsy's little first-form friends had been to Cultural Soc on Monday with Mamzelle. This was useful already, since it reminded us that Mamzelle had a good alibi between 4.20 and 5.20, but then the story became even more interesting. The shrimp had been let out of Cultural Soc five minutes early

because she had a slight stomach ache. At just after 5.15 she had arrived in Old Wing cloakroom to collect her hat and coat, and there she had unexpectedly come upon Miss Bell. Miss Bell was, according to the shrimp, digging through a pile of old coats; then she pulled out a battered copy of *The Arabian Nights*, snapped, 'I'm confiscating this,' and stalked off towards Library corridor.

Daisy and I both realized what this meant at once. It brought the time during which the killer must have struck down to less than half an hour. If Miss Bell had been alive and in Old Wing cloakroom at 5.15, she could not have even arrived in the Gym before 5.20, and that meant she must have been killed between 5.20 and 5.45.

'Do you know,' said Daisy to me, once Betsy had run off again, 'detecting a murder is turning out to be rather easy. If we carry on like this we shall have solved it in no time.'

I was not so sure. It seemed to me that we still had a great deal to discover. But I did agree that we seemed to be making a very good start, and soon we had even more information.

A fourth former waiting about for confirmation study with Mr MacLean had seen Miss Bell go into the mistresses' common room on Library corridor, just after lessons ended but before socs began, followed by Miss Parker. A few minutes later they had come out again – both looking frightfully cross, Miss Bell's face icy and Miss Parker's hair all spiky with rage (the fourth former's words) – and marched away together towards an empty form room. This sounded very much like the beginnings of another spectacular argument. That it had taken place on the evening Miss Bell died was extremely suspicious.

Then Felicity Carrington (a fifth former, who was dreadfully disappointed that she had nothing to say about Miss Bell) mentioned that she had seen Miss Lappet going into Miss Griffin's office just after half past four, her glasses wobbling and her enormous bosom heaving, looking terribly upset about something. Daisy was very excited. 'What if she was complaining about Miss Bell being given the Deputy job?' she asked me in a low voice. 'And then, if Miss Griffin refused to listen to her, what if she decided to take matters into *her own hands*?'

'Hmm,' I said thoughtfully. We now knew that two more of our suspects had stayed at school after hours, and neither of them yet had any sort of alibi for the time of the murder. I noted it all down on our suspect list.





Things began to look very black for Miss Parker. In Maths, Daisy began talking loudly about a favourite fountain pen that she must have lost somewhere in the corridors after Lit. Soc on Monday evening. 'You didn't see it, did you?' she asked Miss Parker.

'You mustn't be so careless with your possessions,' Miss Parker told her crossly while she scribbled scarlet correction lines across her work. 'You are a wickedly negligent girl sometimes. As it happens, I left school at the end of lessons on Monday, so I wouldn't have come across it.'

She turned to give Beanie a telling off (she was gnawing her plait and staring despairingly at a page so covered in scored out numbers it was almost solid blue), and I spun round to Daisy in excitement. Kitty, however, got there first. She nudged Daisy, grinning.

'Gosh, what a filthy liar she is!' she whispered, glancing carefully over at Miss Parker, who was now shouting at Beanie. 'What she said about leaving at the end of school's a load of tosh. I saw her when I was walking back towards Library corridor after Cultural Soc ended. She was sitting in one of the empty form rooms, her face all angry scarlet. And her hair was in such a state! I'd bet anything that she and Miss Bell had been arguing again—I say! I wonder if she's a secret agent for this Russian crime ring that's kidnapped Miss Bell! Wouldn't that be exciting?'

'Hum,' said Daisy, looking across the room. 'If I were a Russian crime lord and wanted a secret agent' – Miss Parker was holding her head in her hands and groaning in frustration as Beanie gave her a fifth wrong answer to the same question – 'I wouldn't choose *Miss Parker*. She'd refuse to do anything and

then run off in a rage.'

'Very true,' said Kitty, and giggled.

I nudged Daisy, extremely impressed by her evasive tactics, and she winked back at me. We both knew that we were getting somewhere. Miss Parker's alibi was becoming weaker and weaker – we now knew that she had been near the Gym, alone, close to the time when Miss Bell's murder must have taken place, and she had lied about it. Had she really argued with Miss Bell again? If so, why was she trying to hide it? It was like a plot from one of Daisy's books.

But all the same, I couldn't help wondering whether Miss Parker could really *kill* someone. She was a very angry person, and we all knew it – but so is Lavinia, and for all her shouting she is really mostly harmless. It's as if all that yelling and kicking gets the rage out of her and she has none left to do worse things. Was it the same for Miss Parker?

'But what if *Mamzelle* was the kidnapper?' asked Kitty as we were walking between lessons. Evidently she was still thinking about what Daisy had said in Maths; about secret Russian agents abducting Miss Bell. 'She's been behaving awfully strangely lately –

Sophie, tell them what you told me yesterday.'

Sophie Croke-Finchley, who is in the other third form dorm and is a musical prodigy, grinned. 'Oh yes,' she said. 'It was terribly odd. I had my lesson with The One—'

'When?' asked Daisy, cutting her off.

'Oh, four twenty to four fifty, same as always,' Sophie said, blinking a bit. 'But *anyway*, I stayed on in the Music room afterwards, practising, and I noticed after a bit that someone else was in the small practice room next to me, and they were making the oddest sounds. Garglings and yellings – not music at all! I thought for a while that there were two people in there, speaking in tongues, but then I realized that it was Mamzelle, talking to herself in English and then repeating it in French! She carried on for ages – until almost five forty-five, when I had to go – and then just as I was leaving she came out of her practice room, and saw me. She looked awfully frightened, for some reason, and then she hared down the hall towards New Wing. Isn't that odd?'

Daisy and I agreed that it was. But all I could think was how we finally had a proper alibi for one of our

suspects.





3

In Div., we found another alibi.

Mr MacLean, who we had seen lurking so promisingly next to the Gym on Monday evening, certainly looks a bit like a murderer. He wears filthy, egg-stained jackets, his hair is greasy, and in Prayers he leers at us over the lectern. It would have been very easy and satisfying if he had been Miss Bell's killer, but it was not to be. Mr MacLean began telling us all about the confirmation training we would be taking next year, when we got to the fourth form. 'The girls enjoy it so!' he said, beaming at us with his nasty yellow teeth. 'Why, the class I took on Monday was

so fascinating that we managed to overrun by nearly half an hour! In the end I had to tell them to hurry so as not to be late for dinner!'

If that was true, it gave Mr MacLean an alibi for the time of the murder. When we got back up to House for lunch, Daisy made enquiries – and Mr MacLean's impossibly perfect alibi turned out to be entirely true. He had let his class out at 5.45, which meant that he would not have been able to go to the Gym, murder Miss Bell and be back in Library corridor talking to Marnzelle and Miss Tennyson by the time we saw him there on Monday evening.

Daisy and I looked at each other in amazement. We had managed to get rid of two suspects in one morning.

It was time to update my suspect list.

SUSPECT LIST

1. *Miss Parker*. MOTIVE: Jealous rage.
ALIBI: None yet between 5.20 and 5.45 p.m.
NOTES: Was seen arguing with the victim at 4.20 on the day of the murder and at 5.20 observed alone in New Wing form room (near Gym) by Kitty Freebody.
2. *Miss Hopkins*. MOTIVE: Getting rid of a love rival. ALIBI: Good. Up in Pavilion at time of murder. RULED OUT.
3. *Miss Lappet*. MOTIVE: Wants the Deputy Headmistress job. ALIBI: None yet.
NOTES: Was seen going into Miss Griffin's study just after 4.30, in agitated state, by Felicity Carrington.
4. *Miss Tennyson*. MOTIVE: Wants the Deputy Headmistress job. ALIBI: None yet between 5.20 and 5.50. NOTES: Was observed near Gym just after murder, by Daisy Wells and Hazel Wong.
5. *Mamzelle*. MOTIVE: None yet. ALIBI: (None yet.) Good. In Music room between 5.20 and 5.45, observed by Sophie Croke-Finchley. NOTES: Was observed near Gym just after murder, by Daisy Wells and Hazel Wong. RULED OUT.
6. *Mr MacLean*. MOTIVE: None yet. ALIBI: (None yet.) Good. In study with class of confirmation students between 5.20 and 5.45. NOTES: Was observed near Gym just after murder, by Daisy Wells and Hazel Wong. RULED OUT.
7. *The One*. MOTIVE: Anger & Blackmail. None yet. ALIBI: None yet. Taking Sophie Croke-Finchley for Music lesson between 4.20 and 4.50 but none yet between 5.20 and 5.45. NOTES: Was observed near Gym just after murder, by Daisy Wells and Hazel Wong.



4

Ruling out Mr MacLean and Mamzelle in one fell swoop (both of them had seemed so promising!) was oddly disappointing, but what happened after lunch very nearly made up for it. First thing on Wednesday afternoon is Dance in the Gym, and *that* means an hour of torturously bobbing about in circles while Miss Hopkins watches us, her brown hair bouncing out of its clips, and says, 'Straight backs, girls! Straight arms, *straighten* those legs!' If we all turned into boards she would still not be perfectly satisfied with us.

She is particularly displeased with me. She pokes at my waistband and says, 'Perhaps a little more dancing might help with this, Hazel? Now, for heaven's sake *stand up straight.*'

Well, if I upset Miss Hopkins, Miss Hopkins certainly upsets me. I think she is horrible, and I do wish Daisy wasn't so obsessed with her.

That lesson, though, I almost had too much to think about to mind being in Dance. It was the first time I had been back in the Gym since *it* happened, and although it was tidy and ordinary, the floor polished to a shine by Jones the handyman, I still found myself shivering and twitching with nerves. When I walked through the doorway at the beginning of the lesson, I stumbled, and Daisy had to clap me on the back and whisper, 'Buck up, Hazel!' to get me moving again.

We began to dance. *One-two-three, one-two-three*, round in circles I moved, staring about me at the great big glassy windows and balance beams, and feeling amazed that nothing in the Gym had changed at all.

Round and round we danced, faster and faster, and then I looked over towards the balcony and caught sight of that little dark stain on the floorboards. Jones had obviously tried to scrub it away, but it was still there underneath the polish. Suddenly I remembered how Miss Bell had looked lying there, and how her head had rolled away from me in that awful, sloppy movement.

Forgetting Daisy's command to buck up, I turned my head in fascination and bumped into Beanie. Beanie squealed and grabbed at my gym tunic, I tripped against her and we both went crashing to the floor.

The fall was painful, but Miss Hopkins's response to it was extremely surprising. Instead of bawling at us, she merely came over to where we were lying (I flinched automatically) and said, 'Goodness, girls, how careless of you. Come on now, get up.' It was a miracle, I thought. Or – wait, was *this* suspicious behaviour? Was this the sort of thing those detectives in Daisy's books would make a note of? I peered up at Miss Hopkins, and decided that there was definitely something wrong with her. She was looking at me

and *smiling*.

Still wondering what it could mean, I tried to get to my feet. Then I yelped and hurriedly sat back down again. My ankle was in agony.

'Oh dear,' said Miss Hopkins, still with that same bewilderingly cheerful look on her face. 'You've twisted it. It'll be quite all right in a while, but don't worry about finishing the lesson. Come along, Beanie, *you're* not hurt. Up you get. What is it, Daisy?'

Daisy, of course, had come running over as soon as she saw me fall down.

'Miss Hopkins, can I take Hazel to San?' she asked.

'Oh, yes, why not,' said Miss Hopkins. Now, I know that Miss Hopkins adores Daisy almost as much as Daisy adores her, but that sort of request from anyone ought to have made her suspicious. It didn't. What on earth had *happened* to Miss Hopkins? 'Thank you Daisy. All right, the rest of you, back to work!'

And just like that, Dance carried on without us. It was nearly the most surprising thing to happen all week – apart from finding Miss Bell's dead body, of

course.





Daisy pulled me to my feet, and we hobbled three-legged out of the Gym.

‘Daisy!’ I gasped, partly from amazement and partly from the pain in my ankle, which was awfully bad. ‘Something’s up with Miss Hopkins! She’s behaving extremely strangely! Did you see her just now? I think it might be suspicious behaviour.’

Daisy scowled at me. ‘Hazel,’ she said, ‘you must *stop* accusing mistresses who we know can’t be suspects.’

‘I’m not accusing her! I only—’

‘Miss Hopkins was up in the Pavilion Monday evening. She couldn’t possibly have done it. All that’s happened is that you’ve given us a lovely excuse to wander round the school and do some detective work.’

‘Oh, all right,’ I said, a bit cross that she was ignoring what I had said. ‘But can I at least see Minny first for my ankle?’ By Minny I meant Nurse Minn in the school sanatorium, our little sick-bay; girls go there with anything from a cut knee to pneumonia. You can pop by to get bandaged up or stay there for days if you’re really ill. *San* sounds like a horrid doctor’s office, but it is much nicer than that. Nurse Minn is lovely, with the kind of comfortable plumpness you want to bury your face in, and she gives out cups of tea and sweets even if your fever is only the made-up sort.

I thought that visiting Minny would have nothing to do with our investigation, but as it turned out, it gave us our next important lead.

When we got to San, there was already someone in Nurse Minn’s consulting room. Daisy and I had to hover in the little hallway, waiting, and I realized

that the person being looked after was King Henry herself. We could not help overhearing what she and Minny were saying – although Daisy did bump me closer and closer to the half-open door so as not to miss anything.

The first person we heard properly was King Henry. ‘Oh, don’t worry about me, it’s perfectly – augh – all right.’

Minny tutted. ‘Oh my love, your poor foot!’ she said. ‘Jones is dreadful for not getting it tidied up quicker.’

‘Oh, he’s been so terribly busy lately!’ said King Henry. ‘But he’s working on it now. I only stepped on a stray piece of glass.’

‘Hmm,’ said Minny. ‘*What* did he say happened, again?’

‘He thinks it was burglars,’ said King Henry. ‘It must have happened last night. They didn’t steal anything, though.’

‘Oh dear, don’t look so worried!’ cried Minny. ‘I’m sure it wasn’t, and even if it was, Miss Griffin will sort it all out in no time. New Wing corridor, was it? Yes, well, no harm done. None of us really *liked* those

windows, did we?’

Daisy jabbed me in the ribs, and when I turned round, she was staring at me, eyes wide with excitement. ‘Hazel!’ she hissed. ‘A clue!’

I did not see why a window broken on Tuesday night had anything to do with Miss Bell being murdered on Monday evening, but I learned a long time ago not to say anything when Daisy gets that look on her face.

‘This could be important,’ said Daisy. ‘I must go hunt it down. Say hello to Minny for me!’ And before I could say anything she had rushed away down the stairs in a fearful hurry. By the time King Henry came out into the corridor, limping on her newly-bandaged foot, I was all alone.

While I was having my ankle bound up by Nurse Minn – which was not a very nice experience – and eating a biscuit – which was – Daisy was running through Deepdean looking for Jones.

Jones, as I have said before, is the Deepdean handyman. He lurks about in overalls, scowling at everyone and threatening the shrimps, who he seems to

think of as a breed of larger and more troublesome mouse. He has been here for as long as old Miss Lappet, and is as much a part of Deepdean as Miss Griffin, though a part that gets tidied away on open days and whenever benefactors are about.

It was perhaps lucky that I was not with Daisy, since I make Jones nervous. Whenever he speaks to me he uses a very loud voice, as if I were slow, and looks at my left ear. This is particularly odd, since he has one eye that points right at all times. Daisy, on the other hand, is one of Jones's favourites. I think he sees her the way I used to, as the perfect English Miss, so he gives her slightly pocket-squashed sweets and bashful smiles whenever she passes him in the corridor.

Daisy found Jones exactly where she knew he would be. Just where New Wing corridor turns into Music Wing, there is a carved wooden archway with painted glass panels set into it. The panels show the nine Muses, in white nightdresses with drooping Pre-Raphaelite hair, dripping bundles of flowers. They all look a bit like Miss Tennyson. An artistic benefactor, who is also an Old Girl, painted

the Muses onto the glass herself, which means we all have to be very polite about them and not mention that Clio, the Muse of History, has six toes and only one arm.

Or at least, she used to. Daisy arrived to find that several of the Muses were no more. Something had smashed into the lower panels, hard. Six-toed Clio was gone, and what had been a painting of Terpsichore being attacked by blue lilies was now just a jagged hole. Jones had started to hammer bits of board over the archway.

'Hallo, Jones!' said Daisy.

'Hello, Miss Daisy,' said Jones. 'Not in lessons, then?'

'I came to see *you*, Jones,' said Daisy in her most friendly voice. 'I heard there was a burglary and I wanted to help.'

Jones frowned. 'Ah, but I don't think it *was* burglars now,' he said. 'Nothing's missing, you see. There's just chaos everywhere. And poor Miss Henrietta's hurt her foot! I blame those shrimps.' And he launched into a long complaint about the state of the school during the past few days. 'But when I spoke

to Miss Griffin about it, she told me not to worry! Not worry, I ask you! The only consolation is this – come and look!’ He beckoned Daisy over to one of the panels. ‘See this?’ he asked her. ‘This says to me that whatever vandal did it is already getting their comeuppance.’

He pointed, and Daisy bent in to see. There, on a bit of blue glass, was a long rusty stain.

‘Blood!’ said Jones triumphantly. ‘They cut themselves good and proper. Well, I hope it hurt, because I shall be cleaning up their mess all day at this rate.’

It was at this point that Miss Griffin came striding down New Wing stairs, her neat pale legs encased as usual in her silk stockings and grey tweed skirt. She was coming from her office, which is on the upper floor of the wing, and she looked very annoyed when she saw Daisy standing there.

‘Daisy Wells!’ she said, pausing majestically half-way down. ‘Whatever are you doing out of lessons?’

‘Taking a message to Mr Reid,’ said Daisy promptly. ‘From Miss Lappet. She wants to know if he could take her second-form class next lesson, because she has to cover Science now that, you know, Miss Bell

has gone.’

Miss Griffin was not impressed. ‘Well, you had better not waste any more time talking to Jones, had you?’ she snapped.

‘Yes, Miss Griffin,’ said Daisy, then, ‘No, Miss Griffin. Sorry, Miss Griffin!’

‘Run along then,’ said Miss Griffin, waving her hand like the Queen. Daisy ran along.

If there is one thing that makes Daisy such a good liar, it is that when she lies, she lies *thoroughly*. By the time she came back to where I was waiting for her in San – with my left ankle well wrapped up and two extra biscuits from Nurse Minn in my pocket – The One had agreed to Miss Lappet’s phantom request, and five minutes after I hobbled into our History lesson Daisy had Miss Lappet convinced that she had actually asked Daisy to take the message in the first place. ‘You are a treasure, Daisy,’ said Miss Lappet, folding her arms over her massive bosom (her cardigan had been buttoned up wrong that day, and it made her look even more misshapen than usual) and blinking down at Daisy through her little glasses. ‘Whatever would the school do without

you?’

‘I don’t know, Miss,’ said Daisy primly. ‘I’m sure everyone would manage *somehow*.’



'I don't understand,' I said to Daisy, on our way up to House at the end of the day (slowly, because of my ankle), 'what Jones's broken window has to do with the murder.'

'Well,' said Daisy, stepping aside to let Lavinia rush past after a second-form shrimp, – 'first of all, it's out of the ordinary. And isn't the first rule of detection to consider everything out of the ordinary as potentially important?'

I thought of Miss Hopkins, but I knew that even if I reminded Daisy of her odd behaviour, it still wouldn't count.

'And secondly, there's what *hasn't* happened. No one apart from King Henry has gone to Minny's with a cut that could have been caused by that glass.'

'How do you know?' I objected.

'Hazel,' said Daisy, 'have you *ever* known Nurse Minn to hear about something and not tell the story ten times over? If someone had come in earlier, with exactly the same sort of cut, King Henry's injury would have reminded her of it. If she didn't tell you about the amazing coincidence—'

'Which she didn't,' I admitted, thinking this was exactly why Daisy was the President of the Detective Society, and I was only the Secretary.

'—then it certainly didn't happen. Which means that whoever cut themselves hasn't reported it, and *that* means they were too afraid to. And we know it must be someone from school – if it had been robbers, Jones would have found other signs of a break-in from outside, and told us about it. What I think is this: last night the murderer came back to move Miss Bell's body out of the school from wherever it had been hidden since Monday evening. They used the Cupboard trolley again, crashed it into the archway,

smashed the glass and cut themselves.'

'But,' I said, 'why wasn't Miss Bell moved on Monday evening?'

'The murderer had to decide what to do with the body. Perhaps they planned to keep it in school, and then realized they couldn't?'

'But nobody found it yesterday!' I said. 'It can't have been that bad a hiding place.'

'Indeed,' said Daisy. 'Actually, I've been thinking about that. It ought to be the next part of our mission: the Hunt for the Hiding Place of Miss Bell's Body. That sounds just like a treasure hunt, doesn't it? Like hunt the slipper, but with a body.'

'Oh, *no*,' I said. I knew perfectly well that looking for a body would be nothing like hunting for a slipper. 'Daisy, I—'

At this point we were interrupted by Beanie scurrying up to us. 'Hello,' she said eagerly, skipping along beside Daisy. 'What's up?'

'Er,' I said. 'We were—'

'We were just discussing Miss Bell,' Daisy finished smoothly.

'Ooh!' said Beanie, wrapping her red and blue House scarf round her hands and nearly dropping her school bag. 'Exciting. D'you really think she's been kidnapped by the East— Oh sorry, Hazel.'

Beanie is one of the only people at Deepdean who would have thought to apologize for that.

'I heard she'd resigned,' I said, to thank her.

'No!' said Beanie, who in her own kind-hearted way was as much of a gossip as Kitty. 'But Miss Griffin was going to announce her as the new Deputy! Unless she was too upset by The One jilting her to care ...'

'Hmm,' I said. 'Perhaps.'

'Oh, I do hate it when people quarrel,' said Beanie unhappily. 'I almost wish she *had* been kidnapped by a gang – or would that be worse?'

'*Much* worse,' said Daisy, hitching her bag up onto her shoulder and elbowing Beanie to cheer her up. Beanie is so like a little dog that not even Daisy, who doesn't usually bother much about other people's feelings, can bear seeing her disappointed. 'I heard they go about stabbing knives into gang members who are disloyal, and then they leave horrible mes-

sages for the family in their loved one's blood.'

Beanie's good-natured brown eyes widened in fascinated horror.

'Stabbing and that sort of thing is absolutely rife in Russia, my uncle says,' Daisy continued.

'Wells!' said Virginia Overton, who was walking past and heard Daisy. 'That's a fearful lie! Don't you believe her, Martineau.'

'I didn't,' said Beanie quickly. 'I'm perfectly all right.'

Virginia sniffed. 'I hope so,' she said. 'I've got my eye on you, Wells.'

We finished the walk up to House talking about Beanie's pony, Boggles, whom she had left at home and missed passionately. Daisy, in turn, began to tell a story about her pony, Gladstone, who was a genius and had once jumped a six-foot hedge. They chattered away, and I stared up through the empty tree branches at the tall houses and the darkening sky, and worried and worried about the murder.

Was it really the murderer who had smashed those windows? And if so, was it while they were removing Miss Bell's body from the school? Where

had it been hidden in the meantime? ... And, most importantly of all, who was the murderer? We had established alibis for Mamzelle, Mr MacLean, and Miss Hopkins, but Miss Lappet, Miss Parker, Miss Tennyson and The One still had no alibis at all, and they had all been near the Gym at the right time. Which of them had done it?