

← PART EIGHT →



THE DETECTIVE SOCIETY
SOLVES THE CASE



1

The next day, Tuesday, the police really *did* arrive. We walked down to school in a biting wind which left my face bright red and raw and turned the end of Daisy's nose a delicate pink. Lavinia, in a cruel mood, tripped Beanie up and spilled her book bag open, and we had to sprint about catching bits of flying paper while Beanie wailed and Kitty comforted her and passing shrimps giggled.

We were brought up short by the sight of a policeman standing in front of Old Wing Entrance. He was in uniform, with a blue buttoned-up jacket and tall blue hat, and as we crept past on our way inside

he seemed impossibly severe and awful. The guilt of what I knew we had done to Miss Tennyson went sizzling through me. For a moment *I* felt like the murderer.

We saw another policeman on the way to Prayers. He was much younger than the tall one at Old Wing Entrance, and he had a thin neck and spots all across his narrow cheeks.

'*Dreamy*,' whispered Kitty.

'You're desperate,' Lavinia told her scornfully.

'Quiet, girls,' said Miss Lappet, on her way past. I flinched when I saw her. She looked worse than ever – red-nosed and with two cardigan buttons gaping open. She squinted at us all and said unsteadily, 'Top buttons done up, if you please.'

As she staggered away, I breathed a little easier. I was still terrified that the murderer might secretly be waiting for the right moment to catch us and add us to their list of victims.

Prayers was very odd. Miss Griffin seemed determined to carry on as though nothing had happened, even though there were now two empty seats where Miss Bell and Miss Tennyson ought to have been.

Everyone kept turning round and craning their necks to look at the gaps, and Miss Griffin gave all the turners and craners paralysing stares whenever she caught their eye.

Miss Griffin did mention the police, though. It would have been difficult not to. 'I would like you girls to extend them every courtesy,' she told us sternly, 'while they carry out their investigations, which I'm sure we all hope will be completed as quickly as possible. The sooner this regrettable business is cleared up, the better. And now, the day's notices ...'

I saw Daisy looking at the spotty policeman thoughtfully as we passed him again on the way to Maths. She had her planning expression on, and I suspected that I was about to be asked to do something illegal.

Sure enough, while Miss Parker was writing out sums for us on the blackboard, and looking furious and stiff-haired as she did it, I was slipped a note which read:

At bunbreak go straight for the spotty policeman. I'll do the talking – D.

This sounded suspiciously like there would be no time to collect our biscuits. I did not much like that. Tuesdays are Peek Frean bourbon creams, my favourite. They are even better than gingernuts.

Sure enough, as soon as the bunbreak bell went, Daisy seized my hand and rushed me out of Science, down the stairs and into Library corridor. The spotty policeman was standing next to the mistresses' common-room door, watching the opposite wall with a slightly cross-eyed stare. I looked at him again, and was still unable to understand what Kitty saw in him.

Daisy, however, seemed absolutely charmed. She tugged at her plait until it came loose over her shoulders, dropped her book bag on my feet and then rushed up to the policeman with a very Kitty-like squeal of glee.

'Oh!' she exclaimed. 'I've always wanted to meet a policeman!'

Before the spotty policeman had time to realize what was happening to him, she had pounced on his arm and was clinging to it, gazing up at him raptly. He started and a look of panic spread over his spotty face.

‘Good morning, Miss,’ he said awkwardly. ‘What can I do for you?’

Daisy widened her blue eyes at him. ‘I think policemen are fascinating,’ she said breathlessly. ‘All that work you do – it’s simply marvellous. Are you a *detective*?’

The spotty policeman coughed. A blotchy flush spread all the way up his thin neck to the tips of his ears.

‘Yes, Miss, I am,’ he said, and then blushed even more.

‘Oh!’ gasped Daisy. ‘It must be the most wonderful thing in the world. You must be awfully clever.’

‘Oh no,’ said the policeman. ‘Oh no, no, no, not me.’

‘Oh, but you are! It’s all round the school that you were the one who first realized that this might not be a suicide.’

The policeman’s skinny chest puffed out. ‘Is it?’ he asked squeakily. ‘Well, I suppose – see – yes, all right. At first we thought it was just your average – bottle of Veronal by the bed, scrap of writing on her blotter that read “I am so sorry to do this to you”. But I noticed something interesting. She was lying so nice on the bed, nightdress done up perfectly, hair brushed, but then there were scratches on her hands, and a little cut on her lip – as though she’d struggled. It didn’t add up, and I said so to the chief. Then we went to interview the lady who runs your Miss Tennyson’s boarding house, and *she* said someone came to visit her on Saturday, the night she died. A woman.’

My heart jumped. Had it been Miss Lappet or Miss Hopkins?

‘Oh!’ squealed Daisy, on cue. ‘How frightfully exciting!’

The policeman beamed at her. ‘Of course,’ he said, ‘you mustn’t tell anyone what I’ve just told you. It’s strictly confidential.’

‘Oh yes,’ said Daisy. ‘Strictly. But – strictly confidential, again – what did she look like, this woman?’

She asked it a little too quickly, and it suddenly sounded strange. I winced inwardly. Daisy tried to cover her mistake by adding, in her silliest voice, 'I mean, was she all *murderous*?'

But even with her charm on, she had gone too far. The policeman blinked and flushed, and then seemed to come out of the spell Daisy had put him under.

'H-here!' he said, stammering. 'What d'you want to know that for? You're going to go round telling all your friends, aren't you?'

'No!'

'You'd better not! This is very privileged information. Oh, I oughtn't to have told you so much about it. Promise me you won't tell anyone else I did? The chief'll have me up for it.'

'Oh, of *course* I won't,' said Daisy, being as reassuring as possible. 'Don't be so silly! I think you're terribly lucky, being in the middle of it like that! Do you know—'

But at that moment a man came out of the mistresses' common room and saw Daisy speaking to the spotty policeman. This man had a long nose,

black eyes and thick dark hair slicked back from his forehead. He looked extremely official. In fact, I realized, this must be the police chief the spotty policeman had mentioned.

'Rogers!' the chief said sharply, his face crumpling up in annoyance. 'Don't talk to the young ladies.' He gave Daisy a very nasty glare, and she stared back at him, unmoved.

'Goodbye, Mr Detective,' she said to Rogers, looking up at him through her eyelashes. With one more withering glare at the police chief, she said, 'Come on, Hazel, we must be going now,' and stalked away down Library corridor.



Daisy plunged along so fast that I could not keep up with her. I was still puffing along Library corridor when she reached the end and flicked round the corner into New Wing. There was a shriek, a *thump*, then a chorus of horrified gasps, and I heard Daisy's voice, high with panic, crying, 'Oh, I'm so terribly sorry ... Oh, Miss Griffin – oh, oh, here, let me—'

I dashed round the corner and came face to face with a catastrophe. The corridor was absolutely littered with things – papers and exercise books, hairpins and bull's eyes and pencils – all clattering and rolling about. Daisy, in her haste, had careened

straight into the neat and tidy form of Miss Griffin. I gaped in horror.

Daisy was on her knees, frantically scooping things up again. Miss Griffin's carefully set hair was disarranged and her expression was horrible to see. Everyone began to gather round, but Miss Griffin rapped out, 'Move along, girls,' and they all fled in terror.

I got down next to Daisy. She was sliding about over the tiles, picking up papers and stammering, 'Miss Griffin, I am so terribly sorry, please believe me,' but Miss Griffin did not look as though she believed anything much.

I picked up a letter, bending its corner, and Miss Griffin snapped, 'Don't touch that, Wong. Oh, out of the way, both of you, so you don't cause any more damage.' I could tell she was terribly angry. I had never heard her snarl at a girl like that before.

Daisy, trembling, presented Miss Griffin with the pile of papers she had already collected and we both shuffled backwards to begin scooping up the things from Daisy's bag. Miss Griffin, meanwhile, knelt down in her impeccable tweed skirt and gathered up

papers as though she was one of Deepdean's maids. It made me burn with shame. I felt as if we had both let the school down terribly. Daisy kept stammering out how sorry she was, but Miss Griffin was in no mood to listen.

'Wells, *enough*. This does not become you at all. Deepdean girls should accept the blame for their mistakes with the same grace and quiet dignity that they show in the rest of their lives. I do not expect to see my girls tearing about the school like barbarians. Quite frankly, I am disappointed in you. You may go.'

'Yes, Miss Griffin,' said Daisy weakly, and she curtsayed, though slightly lopsidedly, because she had the contents of her book bag loose in her arms. Then we both scuttled away, feeling like the smallest of small shrimps.

'I thought I was for it,' Daisy whispered to me once we were far enough down the corridor. 'Oh Lord, though, look at the time. We shall be fearfully late for Art.'

We looked round once more, to make sure that Miss Griffin was not watching us (she wasn't – she had just bent down to pick up something else), and

then we ran for it.

I always enjoy Art. This is less to do with the Art itself, and more to do with the fact that to The One, Hong Kong is part of a magical, made-up place called The Orient; because I am from there, he thinks I must be a natural artist. He seems to imagine that everyone in Hong Kong lies about on bright purple divans, in rooms papered with that Chinese print you can get in Wool-worth's, with peacocks wandering about at our feet. Of course this is not true, and I am not a natural artist at all, but The One hasn't noticed. So I copy Chinese dragons out of books I find in the library, and The One is delighted.

That day I was busily colouring in one of my dragons when I noticed that Daisy had stopped work and was scrabbling about in her book bag with an awful expression on her face.

'Is something wrong?' I whispered.

In answer, Daisy took her bag and tipped the whole thing up over her desk. Pencils, rubbers and bits of string rained down, and Daisy began to hunt through them, picking each thing up and then tossing it aside again a moment later.

'Hazel,' she said, still hunting away frantically, 'Hazel, *I can't find the earring.*'

I went cold. 'Are you sure?'

'Of course I'm sure,' Daisy hissed, gesturing at the contents of her bag. There certainly was no gold earring to be seen.

My last look back at Miss Griffin played like a film-reel in my head. She had been bending down over something small lying on the tiles, looking at it intently. I glanced at Daisy, and saw that she was having exactly the same thought as me.

'What shall we do?' she gasped. 'Miss Griffin will put it straight into Davey Jones.' *Davey Jones* is our name for Miss Griffin's box of confiscated items. It sits in her office and we call it that because you know that once something's gone in there you'll never see it again. 'We'll never get it back. How will we confront our suspects if we don't have the earring? Oh, Hazel, our beautiful case. It's ruined!'

'Well,' I said, surprising myself by what came out of my mouth next, 'if we need it, we'll just have to get it back. We'll go to Miss Griffin's office at lunch and you can tell her that it's a present for your mother,

or something. It's worth a try, anyway. After all, Miss Griffin likes you.'

'She did until I ran into her half an hour ago,' said Daisy. 'But still, it's an excellent idea, Hazel! Whatever has got into you?'

'I want to solve the case,' I said. 'I want the person who killed Miss Bell and Miss Tennyson punished. You said yourself how important it was.'

Daisy raised her eyebrows. 'Yes, but – Hazel Wong, encouraging *me* to tell a lie! I never thought I'd see the day. You're right, though. We need that earring, and we're going to get it back!'



Daisy and I made for Miss Griffin's office, on the top floor of New Wing, at the end of lunch. We should not really have been in New Wing out of lesson time, of course, but things were still so mixed up after Miss Tennyson's death that no one had time to notice us running by except the dark-haired chief of police, who gave us a *look* as we passed him on our way up the stairs by the founder's portrait. I hoped we were looking innocent.

The door to Miss Griffin's office was closed. Daisy and I grimaced at each other encouragingly and then Daisy knocked on the door. My heart was hammer-

ing as we waited to hear Miss Griffin's voice, but the person who answered our knock was not Miss Griffin at all. It was Miss Lappet.

'Come in!' she called, and there was a hurried clinking noise. Daisy and I looked at each other in a panic. Neither of us had expected this. Asking Miss Griffin for the earring was terrifying enough, but asking one of our three remaining suspects for the evidence that might prove that she had done it – that was more frightening altogether.

'Come in!' Miss Lappet called again, and this time her voice was tinged with annoyance.

'We'll just have to bluff it!' Daisy whispered to me. 'This could be a way to finally eliminate her!'

Or prove that she did the murders, I thought. I was about to tell Daisy not to go in, but she was already pushing open the door.

Daisy is a marvellous actress, and at that moment I was glad. My heart was drumming painfully in my chest, and my knees were wobbling, but Daisy behaved as though nothing was wrong at all. 'Oh! Miss Lappet!' she said, as though it was a jolly surprise. 'Good afternoon!'

'Good afternoon, Daisy, Hazel,' said Miss Lappet. She was at the desk where Miss Bell used to work, next to Miss Griffin's big green leather one, and she was squinting at us. Her grey hair was fluffy, her glasses were askew and there was a stain on her enormous blouse front. She looked a harmless fright. But appearances, I had learned, could be deceptive. I made sure to stop a safe distance away from her, halfway across Miss Griffin's green and blue patterned carpet, and let Daisy speak.

'Miss Lappet,' she said, 'this is a terribly awful thing to ask of you. I really ought to wait until Miss Griffin comes back – it's a rather difficult request—'

That got to Miss Lappet, of course.

'As you can see, today I am acting as Miss Griffin's secretary while she deals with the police. Anything you can say to Miss Griffin, you can say to me, dear,' she said.

'Oh!' Daisy said, 'In that case ... I'm sure Miss Griffin told you that I bumped into her this morning. I feel like such an imbecile, I shall *never* forgive myself for it, but – well, I dropped something when I crashed into her. It was something I oughtn't to have

had, but Mummy's birthday is next week. I know it was terribly wrong of me to have her present down at school, and as soon as I found it was missing I realized that the only thing to do was come to Miss Griffin and simply beg her to let me have it back.'

'How sweet,' said Miss Lappet, slurring the W slightly. 'What was it, exactly?'

I braced myself, feeling as though I was about to be tackled by a very large Big Girl wielding a hockey stick.

'Well, I bought Mummy a pair of gold earrings, but when I looked in Art I could only find one of them still in their box. It's two long teardrops, one above the other.'

I waited for Miss Lappet to jump up from her seat and shout, or faint, or hurl Miss Griffin's paperweight at us. Instead, she merely looked confused. 'But, Daisy dear, what an odd coincidence. How strange. Are you sure? Miss Griffin has just found her own earring that has been missing all week – a gold one just like that. She showed it to me a minute ago, and here it is still in her desk.'

And she took something out of one of the desk's many drawers and held it out for us to see. There on her palm sat the earring that we had found in the tunnel, its two gold tears shining. 'You see, this is Miss Griffin's, dear,' Miss Lappet told Daisy. 'Are you sure the earring you lost was like this one?'

Daisy blinked. Then she said, very quickly, 'Oh no, you're right. How annoying! I'm terribly sorry to have bothered you. Come along, Hazel, we ought to be going. I'm sure Miss Lappet is very busy. Come *along*, Hazel.'

She had to drag me out of the room. I couldn't take my eyes off the gold earring in Miss Lappet's hand. *It couldn't be*, I thought, *It couldn't be!* But it was. There the earring sat, looking ordinary as anything, except that what it meant was something utterly terrible.

Miss Lappet was not the murderer.

Neither were Miss Hopkins or The One.

It was *Miss Griffin*.



4

Miss Griffin had done it. Why hadn't we thought of her as a suspect?

Daisy had me by the wrist. She was dragging me along somewhere, and I let her. I didn't much care about anything except what was going on in my head.

Miss Griffin had done it. Of course, as soon as we knew that Miss Lappet's supposed alibi was useless, we should have realized that Miss Griffin's had vanished as well – but we had never even considered her. I thought again about that conversation Daisy had overheard between Miss Griffin and Miss Tennyson.

Why hadn't we realized how sinister Miss Griffin's request had been?

There I was, minding my own business in an opportune listening place in Library corridor, Daisy had told me, and Miss Griffin came up to Miss Tennyson. 'Miss Tennyson,' she said, 'I need to talk to you. You haven't quite finished helping me with that little project of ours. You were so late to my office on Monday evening that we barely got a thing done.'

'Yes, but I made up for it on Tuesday and Wednesday,' Miss Tennyson had said nervously.

'Ah, but not quite,' replied Miss Griffin. 'There's still just a bit of work that needs to be finished.'

Honestly, Hazel, Miss Tennyson went as white as a sheet. She was shaking. 'Can we perhaps schedule another session?' asked Miss Griffin. 'There's just a little more work I'd like you to do – perhaps this evening?'

If it had been any other mistress, we might have been more suspicious. But somehow Miss Griffin had always seemed so remote from the other masters and mistresses, so above everything that went on at Deepdean. And Miss Lappet, Miss Hopkins and The One had all been such good suspects – so had Miss

Tennyson and Miss Parker, to start with. They'd all had motives for killing Miss Bell, while Miss Griffin didn't appear to have any motive at all.

But Miss Griffin *had* done it. *Why?*

I felt Daisy shaking my arm.

'Hazel,' she said. 'You're talking to yourself.'

I blinked, and found that somehow we had ended up in Old Wing cloakroom. The bell for the end of lunch break was ringing.

'Come on,' said Daisy. 'Hide.'

She dragged me into one of the very far corners, which was full of the coats that girls from years ago lost and never bothered to find again. They smelled slightly rotten, and their grey fabric had gone a bit green with age.

I squeezed myself in next to Daisy. We sat there in the dimness, trying not to breathe in the old coat smell too much. Then Daisy reached out her hand and took hold of mine. I could feel it shaking.

'I never guessed it would be Miss Griffin,' she said quietly. 'I didn't want to tell you, but I was nearly sure that it was Miss Hopkins and The One. It was all beginning to fit – motive, means, even the earring.'

But – oh, Miss Griffin!

I nodded, making the coats in front of my face sway. 'She doesn't seem real, does she?' I asked.

'She isn't human,' said Daisy. 'She's a Headmistress through and through. I thought so, anyway. Well! Now we know how the murderer got Miss Tennyson to help – Miss Griffin must have offered the Deputy job in exchange for her services. And that conversation I overheard on Friday makes sense now! Miss Griffin was reminding Miss Tennyson that they were in it together; she must have been asking her to help search the school again that evening, for the lost earring! The torch we saw when we were creeping about on Friday night – well, I suppose that must have been *them*, hunting. Heavens.'

'I wonder why she did it, though? What on earth would be worth murdering two people for, if you are already the Headmistress of Deepdean? Miss Tennyson had to be bumped off because she was on the verge of telling the police, but why ever kill Miss Bell in the first place?'

'She must have had a reason,' I said, although my mind was as blank as Daisy's. Miss Griffin seemed

to have everything, to want for nothing. She ruled Deepdean, had all the other mistresses running after her, was perfectly well-off, and even quite good looking, for an old person. 'I don't know what, though,' I admitted.

'Let's be logical about this,' said Daisy, squeezing my hand. Hers was beginning to feel more steady, although mine was still trembling. 'We know she did it. Just as you said, we know when and how. Now all we need is to know why. Why do people kill other people?'

'Money,' I said promptly. Daisy has drummed these reasons into me enough times for me to know them by heart. 'Power. Love. Fear. Revenge. But Miss Griffin had more money and power than Miss Bell anyway, so it can't have been those.'

'Likewise,' said Daisy, 'revenge seems unlikely. Miss Griffin could have simply not given Miss Bell the Deputy job, or fired her, if she wanted revenge for something. So that leaves Love and Fear. Well, what if – Hazel, tell me if this doesn't make sense – what if Miss Bell was blackmailing Miss Griffin? Asking for money – or, no, the Deputy job – in exchange for

keeping quiet about something? That would explain why Miss Griffin couldn't simply fire Miss Bell.'

'But Miss Griffin seems so perfect!' I objected. 'What could she be blackmailed about?'

'Well, I don't know,' said Daisy, 'but if she's killed two people over it, it must be rather awful. What do you think, though? Am I right?'

Even then, in the middle of everything else going on in my head, I had time to be amazed. Daisy Wells, asking me what I thought about her detective work!

'It does make sense,' I said. 'If anything does.'

'Pity we can't just ask Miss Bell about it, isn't it?' asked Daisy with a little chuckle. 'Excuse me, but *why* were you murdered?'

'Perhaps she left a note,' I said.

Daisy chuckled again. Then she squeezed my fingers so hard that I yelped.

'Hazel,' she said, 'that isn't actually a stupid thing to say *at all*. As all my books point out, blackmailers do generally keep copies of incriminating documents in a safe place for insurance. What if Miss Bell did something like that?'

'If she did,' I said, squeezing back in excitement, 'they might be down at school.'

'Yes!' said Daisy. 'I bet Miss Griffin and Miss Tenyson were looking for them *as well* as the earring last week!'

Then we both remembered that Deepdean was rather a large place. We sank back into the coats, sighing.

'No, wait,' said Daisy, sitting upright again. 'Let's deduce. Miss Bell and Miss Griffin must have prearranged their meeting in the Gym – they wouldn't have met there by chance on a Monday evening. So Miss Bell would have had time to prepare for it – and hide any evidence she was using to blackmail Miss Griffin. She would have put it somewhere safe, somewhere Miss Griffin wouldn't have thought of when she was looking for it.'

'So not the mistresses' common room,' I said. 'And not the science labs, either.'

'Too obvious,' Daisy agreed. 'Well, where do we know Miss Bell went on Monday night?'

'The Gym,' I said. 'But there's nowhere to hide something in the Gym. Jones would find it if it was

in the Cupboard, and besides, it's too close to the meeting place.'

Then, in a flash of something that Daisy would have called Sherlocky brilliance if it had happened to her, I saw the answer. 'Daisy,' I breathed. '*The cloak-room*. Right here! Remember the first former who found Miss Bell digging about behind the coats in here? We only used what she said to establish when Miss Bell left for the Gym, but what if Miss Bell was here to hide her evidence?'

Daisy said something extremely unladylike. Then she hugged me. I glowed.

'Coat pockets!' she cried. 'Nobody ever uses these ratty old ones, they stay here until they rot away! It's the perfect hiding place! Quick, Hazel, dig!'

And she began pawing through the pile of old coats that surrounded us.

Shivering with excitement, I hunted with her. We were on the trail again, I thought, as I shoved my hand into ripped and dirty pockets, pulling out snapped pencils and coat-furry sweets. Then my fingertips bumped against something large and cardboard-stiff that crackled when I squeezed it.

Holding my breath, I pulled it out and parted the coats in front of me to see that I was clutching a red notebook that said, in small precise letters on its cover,



'Daisy,' I said quietly. 'I've got it.'





5

Daisy gave a whoop of triumph – but I couldn't get past those two carefully inked words.

I got a chill all the way down my spine. *Verity Abraham*. She seemed to be everywhere. I know it sounds stupid, but at that moment I really *did* wonder if she was haunting me. I imagined her with her hanging-down hair and her bloodstained clothes and a hot-and-cold shiver ran through me.

Daisy didn't see it that way at all. 'Goodness,' she said, peering at the book. 'Verity. I say, that's Verity Abraham!'

'I know,' I said shakily. It was funny to think that before Verity became my ghost girl she had been a real, ordinary schoolgirl at Deepdean, who ate biscuits and kept a diary. I took a deep breath, bent the spine open, and began to read.

25th September 1933

The beginning of another year! And such an important year too. Daddy keeps on reminding me that this is the year I begin to prepare for my university entrance exam. It is terribly important, I know, and I am lucky enough to be coached by Miss Griffin herself! I am amazed to have been chosen by her. I always thought – well, I'm ashamed to say it now, but I always assumed that she did not like me very much. She always seemed to avoid me in the corridors. So I was simply amazed to be told that she had requested me specially! I have made a resolution to buck up and work as hard as I possibly can, so as to be worthy of her.

'Boring,' said Daisy. 'Skim to the racy bit. What? There must *be* one!'

18th October 1933

The exam prep is going - I wish I could say well. I hope it is. I am certainly doing my best, though I fear I am a little slow at times. But I am becoming more and more puzzled by Miss Griffin. She is behaving so *oddly*. She always seems to be on the verge of saying - *something* - and when she is coaching me, certain things make her peculiarly twitchy. We were discussing Jocasta, that mad lady who abandoned her son, Oedipus, and Miss Griffin kept on trying to justify what she did! I did not quite like to disagree with her, since she is the Headmistress, but really! I wonder if she is quite all right.

24th October 1933

I am beginning to suspect that Miss Griffin has some sort of secret! In fact, I think she has a dark secret in her past. I told Henry the other day, and she thinks it's tosh, but I believe I am right. I wonder what it can be?

when she was a mistress at another school – she had a baby. She was not married, and so of course it was hushed up. The baby was given away to a very nice family. That baby was me.

I stopped reading with a gasp, and Daisy gave an undignified squeal. 'Really!' she cried. 'Really!' Oh, Hazel *excitement!*

I couldn't believe it, but then she showed me all the certificates, with my parents' signatures and her own. It really is true. Oh Lord, what shall I do? Mummy is not my mummy any more, and Daddy is no relation to me either – instead, I'm the daughter of a schoolmistress. A schoolmistress! A nobody, and not even married!

What shall I do? I think she wanted me to leap into her arms and call her *Mother*. Of course, I couldn't. I ran out of her office – I don't ever want to go back.

21st November 1933

I told Henry what had happened. She couldn't believe it either. She says I should wait before I tell anyone else, but I don't see why. How could Miss Griffin do this to me? I want to talk to Mummy and Daddy, and make them say that it is all a lie.

22nd November 1933

Miss Griffin wants me to stay quiet too. I think she's alarmed by my reaction. I don't see why she should have expected anything different. She says I have to consider her position, that it should be our secret. But what about *my* position? This is not fair of her!

23rd November 1933

Note from Miss Griffin today, asking me to come and see her on the Gym balcony after the end of school, to 'discuss the situation'. I have stuck it in this book, just in case of - oh, I don't know what. I will go, but it

shan't change my mind. I *will* talk to Mummy and Daddy about it when I go home for the hols. She can't stop me. She can't tell me what to do.

And that was the last thing Verity wrote in her diary.

But it wasn't the last thing in the diary itself. When Daisy shook it, two pieces of paper fell out.

The first was a short note, in Miss Griffin's beautiful copperplate.

Miss Abraham.

I request your company on the Gym balcony at 5.30 this evening, the 23rd November, to discuss the situation between us. Please do not be late.

Rosemary Griffin

The second was in Miss Bell's angular handwriting.

To whom it may concern.
I have evidence to prove that the Headmistress of Deepdean School for Girls, Rosemary Griffin, caused the death of her pupil Verity Abraham in November of 1933. Whether Miss Griffin attacked Verity with the intention of ending her life, or whether it was a tragic accident, I do not know, but the enclosed diary and note together prove that she was present at the moment of Verity's death, and that she caused the incident by revealing to Verity that she was her natural mother. Rosemary Griffin is not fit to hold the post of Headmistress any longer. She should be immediately removed from her position at Deepdean, and I submit myself for consideration as her replacement.

Joan Bell, Monday 29th October 1934

'Fancy!' said Daisy gleefully. 'I'd say that was a motive for murder, all right. It looks like Miss Bell got greedy and wanted to force Miss Griffin out of Deepdean altogether. She'd have lost everything! Oh, if the school only knew!'

I was glowing pink with shock. I could barely take it in. Miss Griffin, the great Miss Griffin, had been involved in a shameful affair, and, as a result of this, had a *baby*. It was not the sort of thing that re-

spectable schoolmistresses did! And Verity had been her daughter! *Had* Miss Griffin killed Verity on purpose, so that she would not talk? Or had it just been an accident? Whatever the truth was, Verity had not committed suicide at all. The person who had written that diary would never have killed herself. So it must have been Miss Griffin's fault. The thought made my skin crawl with horror.

Something occurred to me then. 'The Henry that Verity mentioned – that's King Henry, isn't it? So she's known all the time! That must be why she's been looking so odd, and why she was coming to speak to Miss Tennyson at the Willow. I knew she had something to do with this!'

Daisy nodded. 'She can't have known exactly what was going on, but I bet she suspected. Perhaps she realized that Miss Tennyson had something to do with it, and that's why she was going to meet her on Saturday. But the important thing is that we've got all the evidence we need to accuse Miss Griffin. Whatever she says now, we've got her. Hazel, we've solved the case.'

'Miss Bell solved the case,' I said.

'Don't be an idiot, Hazel,' said Daisy. 'She's dead. She didn't solve anything.'

I was just opening my mouth to argue – or perhaps to say something else about the extraordinary things we had discovered – when the cloakroom door creaked open.



Daisy and I both froze. You see, that was all wrong. It was the middle of a lesson (one which Daisy and I were missing), and so no one should have been wandering around school grounds so quietly.

Luckily we were still hidden behind our rack of discarded coats, at the very back of the room. No one looking in could see us – and that was what saved us.

The door opened all the way, there was a moment of utter silence, and then Miss Griffin said, ‘Daisy? Hazel? Where are you, girls?’

I could feel Daisy’s hand gripping mine, and hear our breathing and our hearts. They sounded as loud

as shouting, and I was shaking so hard that I imagined Miss Griffin seeing clouds of dust flying up off the coats around us.

She had come to find us. She knew! Miss Lappet must have told her we had been looking for the earring. She was going to kill us, I thought frantically, and then bury us next to Miss Bell out in the woods and tell our parents that we had run away!

I thought I had been afraid of the murderer before, during our investigation, but I never knew until that moment how much I did not want to be dead.

‘Girls?’ called Miss Griffin again. ‘Girls, are you in there? Come on out, I’ve got a lovely surprise for you!’

I could not have felt more terrified if she had said, *Come out so I can murder you!*

‘Miss Lappet told me that there’d been a misunderstanding. She gave you a wrong impression earlier. Come out, girls, and I can explain.’

It felt so strange to disobey a mistress. But we did not come out.

At last, Miss Griffin sighed. She pulled the door to, and the room was quiet again.

I was about to jump out of our hiding place, but Daisy hissed, 'Wait!'

We waited, and waited, and *then* we heard Miss Griffin's footsteps moving away.

Daisy collapsed against me, shaking. 'Quick!' she cried. 'We have to get to lessons before she comes back!'

'Really?' I asked doubtfully. My knees were like wet jelly. I wasn't sure I wanted to move at all.

'Do you want to wait for her here?' asked Daisy. I shook my head.

Once we'd left the cloakroom I felt as though I had a spotlight trained on my head. I expected Miss Griffin to pounce on us at any second. I was clutching Verity's diary to my chest like a shield, and when we turned a corner and almost walked into the dark-haired police chief coming the other way, I jumped so hard my teeth chattered.

Daisy shied away from him, and I realized with horror that, despite what had happened, she still wanted to finish the case without help from the police – even though Miss Griffin might be just round the next corner, waiting to catch us. It only took me

a moment to decide that it was time for me to stop behaving like a secretary, or even a second in command. It was up to me to save us.

The policeman was already turning away.

'Excuse me,' I said. 'Wait! We need your help.'

The policeman turned to face me. 'Yes?' he asked politely.

'Hazel!' cried Daisy. 'What are you *doing*?'

I ought to have felt guilty. But once again, I did not feel guilty at all.

'Please help us,' I said in a rush. 'We know who killed Miss Tennyson. It was Miss Griffin, and she's killed our Science mistress Miss Bell as well, and now she's coming after us! *Please!*'

I could tell that he did not believe me. He frowned, and his face crinkled up with it. 'I'm terribly sorry,' he said, 'but what are you talking about?'

'Miss Griffin is the murderer,' I said. 'It's true! *Look!* We've got evidence!'

And I thrust Verity's diary at his chest.

'Hazel!' Daisy shouted again. '*Don't!*'

But the policeman was already flicking through it. At first he was only doing it to be polite – but then his

eyebrows shot up, and his forehead wrinkled, and he began to turn over the pages more quickly.

‘Where did you get this?’ he asked.

‘Oh, never mind that!’ I said. ‘You have to help us! Miss Griffin is after us! She wants to kill us!’

For one awful moment I thought that he was going to turn us away. But instead, he took a deep breath, put his big hands on our shoulders, steered us towards the door of the nearest form room and pushed us inside.

The policeman had saved us from Miss Griffin. I could have hugged him. Daisy, of course, was less pleased. I didn’t even need to look at her to know that she was about to be difficult.

‘All right,’ said the policeman, turning to us with an extremely serious expression on his face. ‘What’s all this about?’

Daisy sniffed. ‘Hazel’s said too much already,’ she said, folding her arms and wrinkling her nose up. ‘I don’t see why I should tell you any more. Who *are* you, anyway? You’ve been here all day and you haven’t even introduced yourself.’

I was horrified in case the policeman sent us back outside, but to my great relief Daisy’s speech seemed only to amuse him.

‘I am Inspector Priestley,’ he told us. ‘And you are?’

‘I am Daisy Wells, daughter of Lord Hastings,’ said Daisy, as though she were the Queen, ‘and this is my friend Hazel Wong. And this is *our* murder case and we’ve solved it without you, thank you very much. No matter what Hazel says, we don’t need your help.’

The Inspector raised his eyebrows at that, so that his whole forehead wrinkled up again. ‘Do you mean to say that you have more than the diary you’ve shown me?’ he asked. ‘You can prove what Hazel has just told me about Miss Griffin?’

Daisy squirmed. I could tell that she was having a terrible inner struggle over whether to reveal our cleverness to the Inspector.

But I did not want to face a murderous Miss Griffin on my own. We had solved the case, and now there was nothing more we could do. As much as Daisy hated it, we had to tell the police what we knew.

‘Yes!’ I said. ‘We know that Miss Griffin killed Miss Bell. Miss Bell was blackmailing her over what had

happened with Verity Abraham last year, you see. It's all in the diary. Miss Bell must have found it while she was doing Miss Griffin's secretary work earlier this year. So Miss Griffin killed Miss Bell to silence her, and made Miss Tennyson help her dispose of the body. Then she killed Miss Tennyson too, because *she* was planning to go to the police. *And* she tried to kill us just now! I know it sounds mad, but we can prove it. We've got evidence. Show him, Daisy.'

Daisy, after another moment's wriggling, stuck her hand into her bag, pulled out the stained gym slip, the piece of string and the bit of Miss Bell's lab coat, and said, 'Oh, all right! But I hope you'll remember later that *we* found these.'

And then we both explained the whole of our investigation to the policeman. I found that once I had started, I couldn't stop, though Daisy kept on butting in with better explanations. We told him about losing the earring – 'Our most important piece of evidence!' said Daisy furiously – and how tracking it down had led us to Miss Griffin. I could tell that the Inspector was only listening politely at first, but as Daisy and I talked, he took a notebook out of his

coat pocket and began to write in it. His face became more and more crumpled, and his eyebrows moved higher and higher up his forehead.

When we had finished he put his pen down, rubbed his hand over his face, and laughed.

'Not bad for your Detective Society's first murder case,' he said.

'You believe us?' said Daisy sharply.

'You present a compelling, if slightly muddled, account of events. It's rather difficult not to believe you. It's a pity you don't have that earring any more, but I'm sure I can close the case without it.'

Daisy made a face at *muddled*, but I was relieved.

'And you'll look for Miss Bell's body?' I asked.

'Yes, I'll send my men out to Oakeshott Woods this afternoon. But until I wrap up the case' – his face became serious again – 'I need to keep you safe from Miss Griffin. I don't like the thought of the two of you roaming about carrying on your Young Miss Marple routine while she's still a free woman.'

'Miss Marple!' hissed Daisy under her breath.

'Holmes and Watson, *if* you please.'

'Is there anywhere you can go for a few hours?' asked Inspector Priestley, pretending he had not heard.

'We could go to Nurse Minn in San,' I offered.

The Inspector nodded. 'Good. You can stay there until Miss Griffin's been arrested. I'll keep one of my men guarding you and put another on her tail. Remember – no heroics! You've already done quite enough.'

'Well, we *did* solve your case for you,' said Daisy.

The Inspector got up from his chair and smoothed down his dark hair. 'Indeed you did, Madam Super,' he said – which I think must have been a joke at Daisy's expense, only she was too pleased to notice it.

'Thank you,' she said, and she put out her hand for the Inspector to take. He shook it very solemnly (I was now more certain than ever that he was not being entirely serious), and then turned and held out his hand to me. I shook it, feeling suddenly rather shy. I looked up at him out of the corner of my eye and had a shock when I caught him winking at me. I dropped his hand, horribly embarrassed, but when

I looked at him again his expression was as polite as ever.



When we were safely in San (Nurse Minn took one fluttery look at the Inspector and made no objections at all to us becoming patients), tucked into two cool white beds next to each other, I suddenly felt very much like crying. I stared up at the ceiling and gulped as quietly as I could into my handkerchief while I shivered all over, as though I really was ill.

Beside me Daisy was gabbling away, of course.

'Do you think we'll get a bravery medal from the police? We *were* brave, weren't we?'

'Very,' I said, my teeth chattering. Water kept leaking out of the sides of my eyes in the most shameful

manner.

'I say!' said Daisy, noticing me. 'Are you all right, Watson?'

'Yes!' I said, my teeth chattering all the more. 'I'm quite all right. Only – I can't stop—'

And I burst into tears.

'Hazel!' cried Daisy, and quick as a flash she leaped out of her bed and hurled herself onto mine. 'Oh, poor Hazel!'

'I'm sorry!' I stuttered. 'I'm not – behaving – very much like a detective.'

'Hazel,' said Daisy, putting her arms round my shoulders and leaning her forehead against mine, 'don't talk nonsense. Throughout this case, you have behaved like the most splendid detective in the world. In fact, because of your heroic and intelligent actions in *The Case of the Murder of Miss Bell* I am going to promote you. From this moment on you are the Vice-President of the Detective Society.'

I gulped. 'Really?' I asked.

'*Really*,' said Daisy. 'Now for heaven's sake, stop crying and start thinking about how to get past our police guard.'

That made me stop crying at once.

'What?' I asked. 'But we're safe here!'

'Who wants to be *safe*?' asked Daisy scornfully. 'I want to see the Inspector arrest Miss Griffin.'

I was not sure I did. I felt cushioned by the lovely soft quiet of San, and terrified at the very thought of going back out into a school where Miss Griffin was still on the lookout for us.

But Daisy, for all her changes in the past few weeks, was still Daisy, and her mad plans were as mad as ever.

'Yes, but how?' I asked.

'Wait,' said Daisy. 'I'm thinking of a plan.'

Then, outside the main San door, we heard voices.

'Come on!' hissed Daisy. 'Let's go and see who it is!'

As soon as we went out of our little room onto the small San landing, where Minny's examination room and all the sickrooms open out into, we could hear that it was two policemen. The one guarding San must have been joined by another, and they were talking.

'... having a meeting now,' said the first policeman as we crept up to the closed main door to the cor-

ridor and pressed our ears against it to listen. 'The chief's idea. Wants to get her to confess.'

'Trust him to go for drama,' said the other. 'Nice touch, though, I admit. Where are they?'

'That music room, down the other end of the school. I'm off there now as reinforcement. You ought to come.'

'Don't I wish I could!' said our policeman. 'But I'm on nanny duty. Little madams can't get hurt – his orders.'

Daisy flushed with annoyance. 'All right,' she said to me. 'An excellent plan has just come into my brain. Wait here.'

She turned and ran into the other San sick room, and came back a moment later dragging a small shrimp behind her. It was Binny.

'What are you doing here?' I asked.

'Got a bad stomach,' said Binny. Daisy glared at her. 'Not really – I just wanted to get out of Latin.'

'Don't I know it,' said Daisy. 'And if you want me to keep mum for you, there's something I need you to do.'

'What?' asked Binny.

'When I tell you,' said Daisy, 'I want you to *scream*.'





8

The landing outside San had gone quiet. The other policeman must have gone off to the meeting in the music room. 'Ready?' whispered Daisy. We were crouching just behind the door. Binny, positioned in the very middle of the San hallway, nodded.

'Three, two, one,' whispered Daisy. 'Scream!' Binny screamed.

It sounded like an express train howling through a tunnel. There was a yell of shock from the policeman out on the landing, and then he came bursting through the door, leaving it wide open and the landing beyond clear.

With Binny's screams still ringing in our ears, Daisy and I ran for it.

We scurried along the corridor towards Music Wing, but just as we were coming to the end of Library corridor I looked behind us and saw the one sight I was hoping like anything that we would avoid.

Miss Griffin was following us.

Daisy clutched my arm in panic, and I clutched at Daisy – and at that moment Miss Griffin realized that she had been seen. The most awful expression came over her face, a *pounce* like a cat on two mice, and she began to stride purposefully towards us.

'Quick!' hissed Daisy. 'RUN!'

And, ignoring all the rules of Deepdean, we ran like hares down New Wing corridor.

I have never been so terrified in my life. I remember galloping along in a sweating awful panic, hearing our feet on the marble tiles – and behind them, the *click, click, click* of Miss Griffin's shoes as she came after us. My heart was burning and hammering in my chest and my ankle throbbed along with it.

'Girls!' called Miss Griffin after us. 'Come here at once! I want to talk to you! You are missing lessons without permission!'

'Ignore her!' panted Daisy.

I did not need to be told twice.

But then we turned the corner into Music Wing and almost crashed into Inspector Priestley.

He was standing in the hallway, a sheaf of papers in his large hands, and at that moment he seemed like the Angel Gabriel or one of the godlike Inspectors from Daisy's novels, descended to earth to save our souls.

'Help!' gasped Daisy, gesturing behind us. 'Miss Griffin!'

The Inspector acted at once.

'Quick!' he said. 'In there!' And he ushered us – or rather, almost shoved us – through the open door of the small music room, before slamming it shut.

He was only just in time. As we leaned against each other, panting as quietly as we could, I heard the clicking of Miss Griffin's shoes once again. They hurried closer and closer – and then stopped. She must have seen the Inspector, I thought.

'Ah, Miss Griffin,' Inspector Priestley said, as though it was the most natural thing in the world that they should meet there. 'You're just in time for our meeting.'

'What meeting?' asked Miss Griffin, sounding extremely ungracious.

'Didn't my sergeant let you know? I'm terribly sorry. I've asked several of the mistresses to meet me here to discuss some developments in the case. In fact, now that you've arrived, we can begin. They're all waiting for you in the music room.'

'Inspector, I am busy. I am looking for two of my pupils. You didn't see two girls pass by here just now, did you?'

I tensed up.

'Ah yes, I did,' said the Inspector. 'They went out of North Entrance in a terrible hurry, I think you've lost them. At least you still have the meeting to console you.'

There was a pause.

'Oh, very well, then,' said Miss Griffin, with bad grace.

I breathed a very quiet sigh of relief.

There was the sound of a door opening and closing, silence outside in the hallway and voices next door to us.

Now, Daisy and I had been shoved into the small music room. It is separate from the big music room, but the two rooms connect by a door, covered with a heavy velvet curtain on the big music room side. Between the door and the curtain there's a narrow little space – just big enough for two girl detectives to squeeze into.

I do wonder whether the Inspector had planned on us listening in. It may have just been a nice coincidence – he never said anything about it to us afterwards – but all the same, Daisy and I opened the connecting door, and slipped in behind the curtain. So we heard exactly what went on at Inspector Priestley's meeting.





Daisy and I positioned ourselves one at each end of the curtain, so that we could peep round it into the room beyond. I squashed my cheek against the shivery-cold stone of the alcove wall and had a splendid view of the music room – with its high, white ceiling, and long, curved picture window that looks out onto the lawns and pond. The tall, severe policeman from Old Entrance was backed up against the far wall, looking official, and several hard classroom chairs had been set out in a semicircle facing the big window. Miss Lappet, Miss Hopkins, The One, Miss Parker and Mamzelle were sitting uncomfortably in

these chairs, and standing in front of them just like a master in front of his form, was Inspector Priestley. Miss Griffin was still being ushered into an empty chair by Rogers, the spotty policeman. She looked put out, and he looked frankly terrified of her. I didn't blame him.

'Is all this strictly necessary?' snapped Miss Griffin. 'I do have a school to run, you know.'

'I am quite aware of that,' said the Inspector. 'However, it could not be avoided. I do promise that I'll try to take up as little of your time as I can.'

'Now, I have called this meeting because of certain developments in my investigation of the death of Miss Tennyson. But I have been made aware that this is not the only unfortunate event Deepdean has suffered recently. You are currently missing your Science mistress, are you not?'

I saw Miss Parker's shoulders shake. I felt a surge of pity for her – she must have been nearly frantic with worry about Miss Bell.

'I am not sure *missing* is the correct word,' said Miss Griffin acidly. 'I received Miss Bell's resignation on my desk last Tuesday morning in the proper

manner. She has left the school, and I wish her good luck. Surely that has no bearing on Miss Tennyson's unfortunate suicide?

The Inspector sighed. 'I am afraid,' he said, 'that the whereabouts of Miss Bell have a great deal to do with this investigation. I am also afraid that those whereabouts are no longer in any doubt. Miss Bell did not resign last Monday at all. Nor did she leave school grounds of her own volition.'

'What do you mean?' cried Miss Parker.

'I mean,' said the Inspector, 'that this afternoon my men discovered a body in Oakeshott Woods; a body that exactly matches the description I have of Miss Bell.'

Miss Parker made a noise that sounded like all the air rushing out of a balloon. Her face had gone red and her mouth was open and gaping fishily, and she clutched at the sides of her chair until her knuckles went red and white in strips.

'The discovery means that this is now a murder inquiry, and you are the suspects.'

Beside me, Daisy made an appreciative noise. I could tell that she was enjoying the Inspector's sense

of theatre.

'I'm afraid, Inspector, that you must be mistaken,' said Miss Griffin calmly.

'I'm afraid that I am not,' said the Inspector, who was just as calm.

Miss Parker's voice, when she spoke, came choking out of her in odd little bursts. 'No,' she said. 'No, she can't be – we argued, I was going to tell her I was sorry – she can't be dead before I've told her how sorry I am!'

Oh, poor Miss Parker, I thought. Daisy sniffed. She did not sound sympathetic.

The Inspector was carrying on. 'The murderer must have been someone who knew her writing well enough to forge a resignation letter, and who had access to Miss Griffin's desk – in short, it must have been one of the six of you.'

'But this is preposterous!' exclaimed Miss Lappet. She was slurring her words again. 'You have not the smallest bit of evidence against any of us.'

'On the contrary,' said the Inspector. 'I have plenty. There is a bloodstain on the Gym floor and another one on the Gym cupboard's trolley. The disused

tunnel under the school bears signs of recent use, including footprints matching Miss Tennyson's shoes, and there is a bloodstain and moss from Oakeshott Woods on Miss Tennyson's abandoned car. I can say with confidence that Miss Tennyson played a part in Miss Bell's death and the disposal of her body. But she did not do it alone.'

I could feel the atmosphere change in the music room, and despite myself I shivered.

'Miss Tennyson's death at first appeared to be a suicide, but certain details did not make sense. There were signs of a struggle, and the body had been rearranged after death. Therefore I deduce that Miss Tennyson's accomplice returned and killed her. Someone in this room is the murderer of *two* women.'



'But why do you think one of us did it?' asked Miss Lappet, in a brief moment of clarity. 'It might be anyone.'

'Yes, exactly,' said Miss Hopkins, scandalized. 'Besides, people like us simply don't do that sort of thing.'

'All of you were at school during Monday evening,' the Inspector explained. 'And all of you had a reason to wish Miss Bell dead.'

'Nonsense!' cried Mamzelle suddenly. 'Not *I*, surely! I had no hatred for Mees Bell.'

'Ah, well, that may be true. But you *do* have a secret, don't you?' said the Inspector.

'Whatever do you mean?' asked Mamzelle. Her chin had gone up, and her face was pale. Behind the curtain, Daisy pinched me in excitement. Whatever did the Inspector mean? Had we missed something else?

'This afternoon I wired the school in France you give as your reference, and they wired back to say that they had never heard of you. In fact, the French do not seem to have any official records of you at all. You aren't Estelle Renault, are you?'

Behind the curtain I gasped, and Daisy kicked me on the ankle so hard that when I inspected it afterwards I could still see the print of her shoe. All the other staff stared up at Mamzelle in shock. She looked round at them and suddenly burst out laughing.

'The things one will do to get a job,' she said, in a very different accent to her ordinary French one. 'It seemed such a little deception when compared to the reward.'

'You *aren't* French?' shrieked Miss Hopkins.

'I'm from Leicester,' said Mamzelle. 'Down on the official records as Stella Higgins, if you must know. I trained as a Science mistress, but there were no jobs going for a grammar-school girl from Leicester. Then I read about this position. I speak French, after all. My mother was from Toulouse. I thought, why not have a go? It was the sort of place I'd dreamed about teaching at all my life, but I knew I'd never get there as Stella Higgins. So I made a little alteration to my records – taking my mother's maiden name, and changing the spelling of my first name. One of my mother's cousins rewrote my reference so that it came from a school in Provence, and I became Mademoiselle Renauld. But if you think that Miss Bell found out, and I killed her to shut her up, you're quite wrong. I had nothing to do with her death, or Miss Tennyson's – I might have changed my name to get a job, but I'd never *kill* anyone to keep it. And if I'm dismissed for this – well, you're fools. You must admit, I've been good at my job.'

That must have been what Mamzelle was doing when Sophie heard her in the music practice room, I thought. Practising her accent! It had only been

a very small mystery, but it was lovely to have it solved.

'Good heavens,' said Miss Hopkins faintly.

'Well,' snapped Miss Griffin. 'We'll deal with this later.'

Inspector Priestley nodded. 'Thank you for clearing that up,' he said to Mamzelle. 'For the moment I shall assume that you are innocent – or rather, that you are guilty of nothing more serious than identity fraud – and move on with the problem of who killed Miss Bell and Miss Tennyson.'

Everyone went very quiet again.

'I didn't do it,' said Miss Parker at last. 'I swear I didn't. Joan and I argued horribly that evening but that's all. I didn't want to tell anyone that we'd had another row – I was embarrassed, so I've been lying about exactly when I left school that day. I was here until nearly six, but I swear I had nothing to do with her being *murdered*. And I thought Joan was alive until just now – didn't I?' she asked The One pleadingly, turning to look at him with huge staring eyes.

The One gulped. 'Miss Parker is telling the truth,' he said. 'Ever since last Tuesday morning she has

been asking me to tell her where Miss Bell is. I found it impossible to make her believe that I had no idea, or that I had nothing to do with her resignation.'

I felt pleased again at that. I had guessed right!

'I see,' said the Inspector. 'But why should Miss Parker think that you had something to do with Miss Bell's disappearance?'

'Because Miss Bell told me that she was going to go back to him,' growled Miss Parker, glaring furiously at The One.

'Isn't this exciting?' Daisy whispered to me. 'Just like the end of one of my novels!'

I thought it was more like being at the pictures. After all, there we were in the dark, watching grown-ups weep and shout and accuse each other of dreadful things.

The One went very red. His Adam's apple gulped up and down in his throat, and at first I thought he wasn't going to say anything at all. But then he seemed to decide something. He swallowed once more, and then reached out and put his hand over Miss Hopkins's.

'Miss Bell,' he said unsteadily, 'did come to see me on Monday evening. But, er, I could not possibly give her what she was asking for. You see – when she came in, I was with Arabella. She, er, surprised us together.'

'And what were you doing with Miss Hopkins?' asked the Inspector, although of course he knew perfectly well.

'Er,' said The One sheepishly, 'I'd rather not say, exactly. You see, we are engaged.'

Miss Griffin gave a hiss of rage. 'After all I've done for you!' she said to Miss Hopkins. 'To waste it by getting *married!*'

All I could think was, *They deserve each other.*

'We're going to be married in the spring,' said Miss Hopkins. 'Isn't it blissful? He asked me at lunch last Friday and I said yes. We knew' – she nodded at Miss Griffin – 'that we had to keep it a *deadly* secret. I couldn't wear the ring he bought me, so he gave me these earrings as well, as a token of his love. They are just like the ones Miss Griffin has, which I'd admired. I was so excited about it on Monday that I slipped away from the after-school hockey tactics

talk halfway through and went down to his cubby to see him.'

'And what time was that?' asked Inspector Priestley.

'Oh, about five thirty, I should think,' said Miss Hopkins. 'We were there together until just before six.'

The One nodded. 'At one point there was a noise in the corridor and I put my head round the door to see who it was. Miss Tennyson was there, and Mam— er, Miss ... er ... Oh, you remember seeing me, surely?' he asked Mamzelle. She nodded.

'You see?' said Miss Hopkins. 'So we both have alibis. And anyway, there was no reason for either of us to want silly old Miss Bell dead, was there? Not once we were engaged. She might have got cross about it, but she couldn't do anything to us. It would have been perfectly foolish to kill her.'

'Murder is always foolish,' said the Inspector. 'If people only murdered each other rationally, I would be out of a job. Now, what about Miss Lappet and Miss Griffin?'

Miss Lappet twitched back in her seat. 'Miss Griffin and I,' she said faintly. 'were in her office, working on administrative matters. All evening.'

I saw Miss Griffin look at her sideways. *What will she say?* I wondered.

'Yes,' she said after the slightest of pauses. 'Miss Lappet is quite right.'

'How convenient,' said the Inspector politely – not, of course, meaning to be polite at all. 'Thank you. Well, taking all of those statements into account, shall I put forward what I believe happened on Monday evening?'

The room went very still. Daisy bounced silently next to me – I could tell she was holding her hand over her mouth to stop herself from squeaking.

'As I said before, I believe that whoever was responsible for Miss Bell's death was also responsible for Miss Tennyson's – to solve one murder is to solve the other. The crucial person in all this, therefore, is Miss Bell herself. Why would someone have wanted to kill her in the first place?'

'Rivalry for the Deputy Headmistress job seems the obvious motive – that would be you, Miss Lappet,

as well as Miss Tennyson. Then there is the rather knotty love-life of Mr Reid' – I very nearly giggled at that – 'which involves Mr Reid himself, as well as Miss Parker and Miss Hopkins.'

'I see that I am not included in this little list,' said Miss Griffin frostily. 'Since I am obviously not a suspect, may I be permitted to leave?'

'Certainly not,' snapped the Inspector. 'Two of your mistresses have died in the past week. If nothing else, as Headmistress you should take responsibility for their welfare.'

'Come now, Inspector,' said Miss Griffin. 'It is rather hard to run a school with no mistresses. I hardly think it would be in my best interests to kill my own staff.'

'Indeed,' said the Inspector. 'For a headmistress to kill her own staff she would have to have a very good reason.'

'Exactly,' said Miss Griffin, sitting back in her chair.

'Exactly,' the Inspector echoed. 'So. *Did* you have a very good reason for doing it?'

Suddenly the rest of the mistresses began to catch on to what was happening. They all whipped their

heads round to stare at Miss Griffin, like people at a tennis match.

'Certainly not!' It was almost a shout.

'It seems to me,' the Inspector went on smoothly, 'that Miss Bell must have been a rather desperate woman. She needed money, did she not? That's why she was performing secretarial duties for you. After she was rejected by Mr Reid, that Deputy job must have become even more important to her. If she had known anything that could have swung the appointment in her favour, or given her more power at Deepdean, I suspect she would have used it. So, *did* she know something about your past that you might want to keep hidden?'

'Do – not – be – ridiculous,' hissed Miss Griffin. 'As I have told you, I was in my office all Monday evening with Miss Lappet.'

'I think you'll find that it was Miss Lappet who told me you were meeting in your office all evening – a tale, incidentally, that I find suspiciously convenient and not particularly likely. I suggest that after a very brief meeting in your office, Miss Lappet left – witnessed by several of your students, I might add – and

then spent much of the evening in another room, perhaps with a bottle to keep her company. Leaving *you* on your own.'

Oh! I thought. Of course, that made sense. If Miss Lappet had been off somewhere drinking, she would not want anyone to know about it. That was why she had made up the story about being with Miss Griffin all evening. And of course, it had suited Miss Griffin to play along with that.

'It isn't true!' shouted Miss Lappet. 'It isn't – what I mean to say is, I was only out of the room for a little while. A very little while. And I only had a nip of something, the merest nip – I resent your implications. Resent them!'

'Oh, do be quiet, Elizabeth,' hissed Miss Griffin.

Miss Lappet flinched and pushed her glasses up her nose. The Inspector looked rather pleased with himself.

'Indeed,' he said. 'And with that, Miss Griffin, your alibi vanishes. Now, I believe that you met Miss Bell on the Gym balcony. During that meeting, she threatened you with blackmail. You argued with her, and then you reached out and pushed her over the

side.'



Inspector Priestley stopped for a moment. The whole room was horribly, heavily silent, as though electricity was crackling round the edges and sparking from person to person. I could hear myself breathing and my heart pounding – I was terrified all over again.

Miss Griffin sat glaring straight ahead, her jaw clenched shut and her fingers white on her lap, but everyone else stared towards her, like people at a tennis match after the last point has been played.

‘Nonsense,’ she said, in an icy-cold voice. ‘This is all nonsense. You have no proof.’

‘Miss Bell asked to see you that evening,’ said Mamzelle suddenly. ‘I remember now. It was in the mistresses’ common room – I was there.’

‘Be *quiet*,’ snarled Miss Griffin.

‘I certainly shall not,’ said Mamzelle, offended. ‘What I said is true and I’m prepared to say so in court.’

‘And you think they’ll believe you? You’re not even French!’

‘I told you I liked Mamzelle,’ I whispered in Daisy’s ear.

‘Shh – he hasn’t got her in the bag yet,’ Daisy whispered back.

‘Quite apart from witness statements,’ the Inspector was saying, unruffled, ‘I can have Miss Bell’s resignation letter and Miss Tennyson’s suicide note tested against your handwriting. My men are fingerprinting Miss Tennyson’s car and the Gym cupboard trolley to match to your prints.’

‘I’ve destroyed the resignation letter,’ snapped Miss Griffin. ‘And those prints could have got there at any time.’

'The woman who runs Miss Tennyson's boarding house has also identified you from a photograph as the woman who came to visit her on Saturday evening,' the Inspector went on.

'No one can tell anything from a photograph – that's common knowledge!'

Despite myself, I was rather impressed by the way Miss Griffin was brazening it out. I certainly wouldn't have been able to lie so quickly and well. She must, I thought, have had a lot of practice.

'And your fingerprints have also been found on Miss Tennyson's bottle of Veronal.'

Miss Griffin made a most unladylike snort. 'This is ridiculous. Are you expecting me to slip up and tell you that I was wearing gloves? Now, you can accuse me of what you like, but I don't believe you could even bring this to trial. If you were hoping for a confession, I'm afraid you will be disappointed.'

And she smiled. It was the most terrifying smile I have ever seen. It looked like it came from a person made out of clockwork.

'Ah,' said Inspector Priestley. 'But I do have one more piece of evidence that may sway you.' And he

took out Verity's diary.

Miss Hopkins whispered, 'Oh, what *is* it?' to The One, as though she were watching a play.

Miss Griffin did not do anything all, but her face went tight all over.

'This diary,' said the Inspector, 'is what Miss Bell intended to use for blackmail. It makes for astonishing reading – as I assume, Miss Griffin, you know. I assume you also know that, on its own, this is enough to have you removed from the school, to ensure that you never teach again, and even possibly to convict you of a previous crime. Its contents also provide the perfect motive for the two murders you have carried out. And that is my case against you.'



When we talked about it afterwards, Daisy swore that at the end of his speech, Inspector Priestley bowed, like a magician who has just finished a trick – but I think that is only what she herself would have done. At any rate, no one was looking at the Inspector then. They were staring at Miss Griffin. She had begun to shake, like a clockwork person coming unwound, and was making odd little hissing noises out of the side of her mouth.

‘How did you find it?’ she asked jerkily. ‘How did you know – who told you – *I have been looking for that diary everywhere!*’

‘I’m afraid I’m not in the habit of revealing my sources,’ said the Inspector.

Miss Griffin stared around, as though she was looking for the first time – at Miss Lappet, who was shivering in her seat, like a jelly wobbling, at Miss Hopkins, clutching The One’s arm for protection, at Miss Parker, who was slowly turning purple with rage, at Mamzelle, who looked as though she had found something nasty on her shoe; and then she turned her head to stare at the velvet curtain we were hiding behind. I swear she looked straight at me.

I jerked back into the stuffy dark, making the edge of the curtain move, and she must have seen it, even if she had not been sure before.

‘Chump!’ gasped Daisy. She did not stop watching, of course. It would have taken more than that to make Daisy stop looking at something so interesting.

From the room beyond I heard a voice that sounded barely human, shouting something. It took me a moment to make out the words, ‘*WELLS! WONG!*’

Something banged on the floor, there was a scuffle, the sound of voices and a *thump*, and then I heard the Inspector, very close to our curtain, saying, 'I am arresting you for attempting to assault an officer of the law, and also for involvement in the deaths of Joan Bell, Amelia Tennyson and Verity Abraham. Come quietly and I shan't have to do anything I might regret later.'

There was a pause, and then, 'He's got her,' breathed Daisy ecstatically. '*Spiffing*.'

And that was the end of Miss Griffin.

It's odd to think that this is so nearly over. I found Miss Bell in the Gym on the 29th of October, and now it is the 18th of December and Christmas is next week. I am at Fallingford, Daisy's home. Paper chains are being put up everywhere, great big spicy branches are being hauled in from outside and wrapped round the banisters, and there are great trays of biscuits and cakes coming out of the kitchen. The dogs keep trying to eat them, which makes Daisy's mother quite cross.

Last term was really finished on the day that I have just described. For a while we all thought that Deepdean might be over too. After what we saw in the music room, Daisy and I were given a police escort back up to House. The tall, stern policeman took us, as Inspector Priestley was busy arresting Miss Griffin. The tall policeman told us not to breathe a word to anyone on pain of death (I think he was joking, but I am not sure), but by the time school ended on Tuesday afternoon, everyone already knew that Miss Griffin had been arrested for murdering Miss Bell and Miss Tennyson.

Some second formers had seen the handcuffed Miss Griffin being led away to a police car, so – as much as the masters and mistresses tried to hide it – the cat was well and truly out of the bag. Quite a few people refused to believe she had committed the murders at first, and there were lots of conspiracy theories about sinister gangs, but in the end, as more bits and pieces came out, everyone began to accept that it must be true.

From that day onwards all the grown-ups seemed to forget about us – even Matron was busy giving

her statement to the police – so meals came at odd times and we were left to hang about doing nothing. We played rounds and rounds of cards in the House common room and gossiped about the murders. I knew that Daisy was dying to brag about our part in the case, but because we had promised the Inspector, she bit her tongue, and we both did very good impressions of people who knew no more about it than the next girl.

In a way, I can still hardly believe it. That episode in the music room really has become a sort of film scene in my head. Perhaps it stops me from feeling so frightened about the events that led up to it. Daisy, of course, thinks that's silly.

Miss Hopkins is leaving Deepdean. She is going away to Derbyshire to live with The One after they are married. Miss Parker is going away too, to teach in London. I think it is too painful for her to be here any more.

When we first heard all this, at the end of November, we really did think that Deepdean might be over for ever. 'After all,' said Kitty, 'we've no mistresses left, so if we do come back next term we shall be

teaching ourselves.' Mothers came down in droves that week to take girls away. Beanie went, and Kitty, and half of the rest of our form.

Then Miss Lappet made her announcement. She called all those girls still at school down to the Hall and told us that Mamzelle was going to be the new Deputy Headmistress. Miss Lappet herself will help Mamzelle hunt for a new headmistress, and new mistresses, during this holiday, and in January the school will reopen for everyone who wants to come back. Mamzelle, by the way, is still Mamzelle, French accent and all. Miss Lappet seems smaller and sadder, but she no longer has her strong after-dinner smell, and when she looks at you both her eyes focus on your face.

After all that news, term was officially over. Letters were sent out to parents explaining things as nicely as possible and asking them to take the rest of us away. I didn't know what I was going to do. At the beginning of the year my father had arranged for me to stay at House over the holidays, but under the circumstances that now seemed rather unlikely.

I was still worrying about it when Daisy got a telegram that said:

DARLING SO GLAD YOU ARE NOT
DEAD COMMA MUST YOU REALLY
COME HOME NOW THOUGH HAD
PLANNED GOING LONDON MOST
INCONVENIENT STOP KISSES
MUMMY

Daisy read it and sighed. 'Mummy thinks telegrams are very now,' she said, 'only I can't make her understand how they ought to read. I suppose I shall have to telephone her – she'll be very awkward about it if we simply turn up.'

'We?' I asked.

'Of course, *we*. You don't think I'd let you rot in House, with just ugly old Matron for company over Christmas, do you?'

Matron gave Daisy the telephone, grumbling rather but wanting very much to be rid of us, and I stood by while Daisy asked the operator for Fallingford 123. The phone rang, and was picked up, and Daisy said: 'Hello, Chapman, is Mummy there? It's – yes – could you ...? Mummy? Mummy, it's Daisy. Yes

– I know – Mummy, you simply must send O'Brian to collect us, they won't have us here any more ... Mummy, the school is *closing* ... Yes, I know I'm perfectly all right, but Mummy, listen ... Oh, *us*? My friend Hazel, she's coming to stay over Christmas. She can sleep in the nursery with me ... Oh, Mummy, honestly, you can still go to London if we're there, just send along O'Brian now and you can have him tomorrow ... Yes ... yes ... oh, good. Goodbye, Mummy.'

'Mummy,' said Daisy after she had put the phone down, 'is sometimes quite difficult to manage. O'Brian will be here in an hour.'

After that, we had a frantic rush gathering all our things together. It didn't work out perfectly – I came away with Kitty's school hat and Lavinia's history book – but when O'Brian pulled up in the drive an hour later we were sitting on our trunks waiting for him. We drove away down Oakeshott Hill, past the closed-up doors of Deepdean – and that, really, is the end of this story.

There are just a few more things to say.

The first is that, last week, we had a visit from King Henry. As I said, she lives not far from Daisy, so Daisy's parents were not at all surprised when she came for tea. I'm not sure how they would have reacted if they could have heard what King Henry told us once Hetty the maid had brought in the tea things and left the room.

'I wanted to say – well, that I think you're both bricks. Utter bricks. I can't thank you enough.'

'Did you *know*?' asked Daisy, spinning her teacup in its saucer excitedly.

King Henry shook her lovely curls. 'No,' she said. 'I never knew, exactly. I only guessed – and how I hoped I was wrong! When Verity died, it was so awful—' She broke off and had to take a sip of tea to calm down. 'I didn't know what to believe. I knew that she couldn't have done it to herself, but if she hadn't ... I hoped it was an accident. I mean, *Miss Griffin!*

'Oh, I know,' said Daisy feelingly.

'I felt terribly bad, taking the Head Girl post when she offered it to me, but because I wasn't *sure*, of course there was nothing I could say. Then Miss Bell

disappeared, and I had the most dreadful feeling, as though it was Verity, all over again. I knew that Miss Griffin had something to do with it, but of course I had no proof. Then Miss Tennyson asked me to meet her in the Willow, and said that she had something to tell me. I was terrified, but I went – and then I saw you, and I simply lost my nerve. When I heard on Monday that *she* was dead too, I nearly fainted. I was sure I'd be next. Honestly, when I heard from that nice Inspector about what you did, what you proved – I realized that you simply saved my life.'

'Oh no, it was nothing,' said Daisy, preening.

'It certainly *was* something. On behalf of the whole of Deepdean,' said King Henry, ignoring her, 'I salute you.'

So, in a way, I suppose that Daisy and I *did* get our praise.

The Inspector came to visit us at Fallingford a few days later, to tell us more about the case. He even let us read a copy of Miss Griffin's confession. It was very odd, seeing Miss Griffin's words down on the page like that. Miss Tennyson had been dragged into

it because she had caught sight of Miss Griffin in Library corridor that evening, all bloody, and Miss Griffin had offered Miss Tennyson the Deputy job in return for not ratting her out. The confession also said that it was a mistake, her pushing Verity, which made me feel sorry for her. Daisy told me to stop being soft about it, especially since Miss Bell and Miss Tennyson's murders had not been mistakes at all.

Miss Griffin is in prison in London, and her sentencing will be some time early next year. I don't think I want to go, although Daisy does, of course. I don't like to think of what is waiting for Miss Griffin at the end of it all.

Daisy says that it should not upset me. It is no more than Miss Griffin deserves. I don't know if I agree with her.

After the Inspector left, Daisy's mother came in. She was dressed for dinner in an arsenic-green silk gown and a real mink wrap. She looked very glamorous, and just like Daisy, only much older and much more vague.

'*What* a handsome man,' she said. 'Why ever did he come?'

'I have told you, Mummy,' said Daisy reproachfully. 'He was that policeman from the case. He came by to make sure we were all right. They're visiting all the girls.'

I still can never believe how Daisy can lie to her parents like that, bare-faced and not even blinking.

'How kind of him,' said her mother, yawning and adjusting her pearls. 'I'm glad it was only that, you know. I wouldn't like to think of you mixed up in one of those nasty police investigations. He really was quite criminally handsome, though. Do you think he'll come back again anytime soon?'

'I do hope so, Mummy,' said Daisy, at her most virtuous. 'He really is a very interesting sort of person.'

And her mother wandered out of the room and left us alone, in fits of giggles.