

THEIR FEUD AT SCHOOL

4^D



ASPLENDID TALE
OF
SCHOOL LIFE.
BY
HILDA RICHARDS.

The Schoolgirls' Own Library N°298



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A Splendid Story of
BARBARA REDFERN and Co.,
of Cliff House School,

By **HILDA RICHARDS.**

Author of "ON TRIAL AT SCHOOL," "THE GIRL WHO PUZZLED CLIFF HOUSE,"
"WHEN CLIFF HOUSE BLUNDERED," etc., etc.

CHAPTER 1.

OFF to Cliff House!

GRANNIE wasn't very old, but, anyway, it wouldn't have mattered at all how old she was because she was such a darling, and Cicely Jerome loved her.

"I shall miss you so much, grannie dear," Cicely said, as she leaned out of the window of the train that was to take her away from home to Cliff House School. "I shall miss everything," she added, a little wistfully; and then pulled her new school hat down a little, just to prevent grannie seeing the glisten of tears in her eyes.

"Of course, you will, Cicely, my dearest. But don't worry. You'll like school. I've heard Cliff House is such a nice place, and

there are such nice girls there. You'll make friends, and then, perhaps, you won't think so much about Pola."

Grannie smiled as she said that, so the sting went out of the words. Cicely managed a smile, too, although it was hard to smile when she thought of Pola, her pony, which she was leaving behind—alas!—for ever. There was not even the consoling thought that she would see dear Pola in the holidays, for grannie's fortune was lost, and the dear old home where they had lived so happily together since the death of Cicely's parents in her babyhood had been sold up.

"It's as bad for you as for me—worse, perhaps, grannie," Cicely said, casting a look at the guard who was smiling at her

and making discreet motions with the flag. "It'll be so horrid living in a flat after our lovely house, won't it?"

Grannie had seen the guard's warning, too, so she just nodded her head, and then took Cicely's hand in hers. Grannie's eyes were very sad, even though she smiled, and her mouth had just the faintest twitch.

"Good-bye; and be brave! Write to me often, won't you? Write to me to-night."

"To-night, without fail. Oh, the train's going! Oh, grannie!" Cicely exclaimed pathetically, leaning as far out of the window as she dared. "It's really good-bye! Oh, dear—"

They kissed, and the guard's shrill whistle told that the train had been delayed as long as possible. To Cicely, as the train moved off, the station became a confused blur. She waved her handkerchief mechanically, and saw her grandmother waving back. She saw the bookstall, with its bright-coloured magazines and periodicals, blurred into a confused mist made by her tears.

"Bye-bye, grannie and Pola and Gyp!" she called softly.

Then Cicely sank back into her corner seat and sighed. She was alone in the compartment, and grannie, always nervous, had tipped the guard to lock her in. All right then until Courtfield Junction, and until then Cicely could have a good cry.

She squared her shoulders, however.

"I must be brave—I must! And it's going to be so nice at school, with tennis and hockey and plenty of friends. I'm silly to cry."

So she dabbed her eyes and bravely forced back tears, looking fixedly at the landscape and trying to forget grannie, her pets, and the old house with its big, rambling garden where she had had so much fun, but which she would never see again.

Hers was to be a new life. No more governesses, but school for the first time, and she would have to make the best of it.

"The girls must never know I've been crying. They'll think I'm a baby. I've got to be brave. And I'm going to win the scholarship this term, so that grannie won't have to go on paying my fees."

Cicely's chin set firmly, and she blinked

her eyes several times to get rid of all tears, and then, after inspecting herself in the mirror, took up a magazine and looked through it.

Keeping her mind off home was not so easy, but she managed it, and busied herself, when the magazine failed to hold her attention, with checking over the equipment she had taken for school.

Time seemed to fly as she planned her future life at the school and built castles in the air. She would win the scholarship, and she would make a name for herself at tennis, and perhaps at hockey, and she would be one of the best students in the Form. Oh, it would be splendid fun!

At Lanefield, she had been told, more Cliff House girls would join the train, while at Courtfield Junction the station would be simply packed with them. A fine chance to see how they all looked, and how they were dressed.

Lanefield seemed ages in coming; there were so many small stations before, but, at last, leaning out of the window she saw the glass roof of the station gleaming in the sunlight in the distance. Nearer it came, and then what a thrill, when she saw bobbing about on the platform hats like her own. Cliff House girls!

The train steamed in, and she saw the girls stooping to pick up handbags, saw them gathering odds and ends under their arms.

—Now they were running for the train, and she wanted to call out to them that here was a compartment; but, instead, being rather shy, she sat down and concealed her face behind a paper.

Really, there was no need to call out, for three girls came running for her compartment and snatched at the door.

"Empty one here, Marcia!"

"One kid in it, Gwen! But the door's stuck!"

The two girls struggled with the door, while the third, a taller girl, hung back. Cicely, for the moment, had forgotten about the door being locked, and wondered why they were struggling so.

"Bother the thing! I say, you inside!" snapped the girl, who had been called Marcia—and her face was dark with anger—"can't you make some effort to help us?"

"Oh, she's a new kid, Marcia!" said the

other girl, Gwen. "You know they're mostly half-witted."

Cicely went pink.

"The door's locked," she explained. "My grannie—"

Marcia Loftus paused with her struggling and laughed.

"Your whatter?" she asked.

"My grannie—my grandmother thought it would be safer if I were locked in."

Cicely saw nothing particularly amusing in that; but the other girls did. Marcia looked at Gwen Cook and giggled. Gwen looked at Marcia and sniggered, while the third tall girl beamed broadly.

"Oh, my goodness—her grannie! Locked in for safety! Ha, ha, ha!"

"But where's her collar and lead?" giggled Gwen mischievously. "I say, is it really coming to Cliff House?"

Marcia surveyed Cicely with a malevolent air. Marcia's face was lean, and her eyes set close together—a most unprepossessing girl, with an obviously bad temper. If she were representative of Cliff House, then all Cicely's castles in the air would come crashing to the ground. But surely that was impossible!

"Well, I mean to get in there," said Marcia. "Can't have a new girl bagging a whole compartment, you know."

"Rather not. I'll watch the door. Agnes, go and tell the guard this wants opening."

But the guard, having noticed the confusion, came hurrying along and found his key. He was a genial man and took his time.

"No need to hurry, miss; we don't go for a minute. I can let you schoolgirls in here. This here is a new young lady, so be nice to her as she's shy. That's right; in you go!"

He pulled open the door, and Gwen Cook gave him sixpence. Then Marcia stepped into the carriage and trod on Cicely's foot.

"Oh!" Cicely gasped in pain.

Gwen Cook followed, and Gwen did precisely the same thing; so did Agnes, the third girl. And all three giggled merrily, as though it were a great joke.

Tears of pain sprang to Cicely's eyes, for the three girls had used all their weight; but she bit her lip and turned to look out of the window.

"Behave yourself properly, Gwen," said

Marcia; "we're in good company here, you know! This girl is used to a special train!"

Cicely was not to be drawn, and looked out of the window. If she had known Marcia Loftus better she would have expected no better conduct from her; but, in the circumstances, she judged the school by the only members of it with whom she had come into contact, and her heart fell. It was only the thought that she would have nice friends that had numbed the pain of parting. But if the other girls at Cliff House were to be like this—

Her thoughts were suddenly interrupted by a prod in the ribs, and she turned, to find that the prod came from a hockey-stick wielded by Marcia.

So Marcia was a hockey player, she reasoned, and probably one of the "set."

"Hey!" said Marcia. "Are you a scholarship girl?"

"Not yet; but I mean to be this term," said Cicely unguardedly.

"What?"

"Oh, my goodness—she means to be!" mocked Gwen. "Did you ever! Can't your grannie afford the fees, or what?"

Cicely faced them, her face white with anger.

"It isn't grannie's fault she has lost all her money. It was some horrid man who invested it badly for her. And I don't see anything to be ashamed of in trying to help her by winning a scholarship!"

Marcia Loftus fairly twittered with excitement. She was the biggest gossip at Cliff House; but her friend, Gwen Cook, ran her a close second. As a rule, it took a good deal of hard work on Marcia's part to rout out the truth about girls' private affairs—especially such affairs as they wished to keep to themselves. But here was someone actually giving information away!

"My goodness, is that so?" she asked. "Your grandmother has lost all her money? Tell me all about it."

Cicely shook her head. It was no affair of Marcia's, for one thing, and, for another, the topic was too painful to be discussed. When her grandmother had broken the news to her she had wept. Everything had seemed so secure and her grandmother had trusted Mr. Lynn so absolutely that ruin had seemed impossible, and therefore so much worse when it had come.

"I don't believe it!" sniffed Gwen Cook. "That's what all paupers say—that they

were once rich. I suppose you had a governess and a pony of your own?"

"Yes, I had——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" pealed Gwen. "Another Bessie Bunter. And your uncle is an earl?"

"No, he isn't. You're thinking of my aunt——"

"What! Your aunt an earl?" cried Gwen, her eyes dancing, and she slapped Marcia on the knee exultantly. "She's better than Bessie. Bessie never said her aunt was an earl."

"My goodness, no! Ha, ha, ha!"

Cicely clenched her hands hard.

"I didn't say that at all; only it happens that my aunt married the Earl of Lalworth. I don't see there's anything funny in that."

But Gwen and Marcia linked arms and hugged each other in ecstacy. There was nothing they liked better than tormenting girls, and especially new girls. Cicely seemed to them a providential gift, and Marcia sniggered and whispered something to Gwen, who giggled.

Gwen nodded her head and laughed; but Cicely, her ears burning like fire, turned to look out of the window, but saw nothing but mist.

Was this what she was to endure at Cliff House? Was she to be sneered at for a pauper? Was it not bad enough to have lost money without suffering this? And a scholarship, too! She had thought it rather splendid to work for a scholarship, and to save her grandmother unnecessary expense. But scholarships, she had to learn, were something disgraceful—at least in the eyes of Marcia, Gwen & Co.

How glad Cicely was when the train began to wend its way through the tangle of rails that presaged Courtfield Junction! Here she would have to change trains, and, at least, she would be able to rid herself of these girls!

"Have to run for the other train," said Gwen, as they got out, "over the bridge."

"Rather—like anything!" Marcia agreed.

Cicely, putting her hat straight and arranging her dress, grasped her one bag and the papers, and followed them on to the platform. Her larger luggage had been looked straight through, so she would not have to bother about it.

Courtfield Junction simply staggered her. It was a large, noisy station, with boys in uniform calling out chocolates and papers, and busy porters trundling trolleys hither

and thither. But what held her attention most was the number of girls in Cliff House hats.

There were laughing girls, smiling girls, serious girls, pretty girls, girls not so pretty, and one very fat girl, and one who was extremely smart and striking and wore a monocle.

Cicely had not time to examine them all carefully, but she did notice that they gave her scarcely a glance, although all over the place there was warm hand-clasping and patting on the back, and faint cheering and ringing, merry laughter.

Surely they were not all like Marcia? But were they perhaps snobs, who looked down on scholarship girls?

"All change! All change!"

Cicely stood helplessly on the platform, and then she saw girls picking up their things and making for the bridge, so she joined in, and, being nearer the bridge, was over it one of the first.

At the top was Marcia tying her shoelace, and Cicely loitered a bit. Then she followed Marcia down to the platform below where two trains waited.

"Quick!" called Gwen.

Marcia and Agnes followed her, and both of them bundled into a compartment. Cicely, however, had no wish to be with them, and she went into the next one, put her bag on the rack, and settled in the farthest corner with a paper before her face.

Now for Cliff House. A slow train to Friardale, which was the station for the school, and then her fate would be sealed.

But alas, her fate was to be sealed before that! Marcia, Gwen, and Agnes had sneaked out of the train and climbed into the one at the other platform, and there they giggled unrestrainedly for several minutes. For the truth was that Cicely Jerome was in the wrong train. Her train was not a slow one to Friardale at all, but an express to Lingham, a journey of eighty miles!

And there she sat, with a paper before her face to conceal herself—and so concealing from herself the fact that the Cliff House girls were getting into the other train, and that her own was about to start!

Cicely was congratulating herself that she had got rid of the unwelcome presence of Marcia & Co. What a relief it would be to complete the journey in solitude, for even her thoughts were pleasanter than the jeers of those other girls.

CHAPTER 2.

The Right Sort!

"ALL clear?"

A porter stood outside Cicely's compartment as the guard asked that question, and he nodded his head. They were off in a moment now! She simply had to take a final peep, and was gratified to know that she would be alone on this journey. Her chief fear had been that there would be a crowd.

But her heart missed a beat as a Cliff House girl came running towards the train. She was such a pretty girl, with such merry blue eyes and pretty olive complexion, that Cicely had to look at her despite herself. And behind that girl came running another—the girl who was so smartly dressed, and who wore a monocle.

"Whoa!" called the front girl, waving her arms. "You can't go yet!"

"Train's going, miss," said the porter. "Stand back!"

But the girl dodged nimbly under his outstretched arm and whipped open the door of Cicely's compartment, tumbling in, while the girl with the monocle waved her hands to the guard to tell him to hold up the train.

Cicely, of course, was amazed at their coolness. What a cheek, stopping the train like that; and yet they looked cheeky imps, both of them! But they looked so jolly that she liked them at once.

It was the shock of her life, therefore, when the girl with the merry eyes caught hold of her arm.

"Quick, duffer!" she exclaimed. "Out you come!" And called over her shoulder: "Jimmy, get her bag!"

The girl with the monocle entered the compartment and snatched up Cicely's bag and papers.

"Wrong train," she explained, with a friendly smile, "if you want Cliff House. Nippy's the word, too. Train always starts at the whistle, you know. Very smart line this."

She went out of the compartment with the bag, while the guard came along to expostulate, and Cicely, wondering much, suffered herself to be taken out on to the platform, which now was crowded with Cliff House girls.

"There she is," she heard Marcia call. "Barbara Redfern, you mean thing, why didn't you let her go on?"

"Trust Babs to spoil a good jape," snapped Gwen.

They were side by side and glowering angrily, so Cicely looked at Babs beside her and saw that that girl's face wore an unwonted frown.

"I don't call it a jape sending a new kid miles into the country," said Babs cuttingly. "If this is how you mean to start the term, Marcia, it's a pity you came back."

"Awful pity," agreed the girl with the monocle, and yawned. "But never mind. Perhaps you'll be found out this term, what?"

Marcia and Gwen turned their backs, and Babs laughed, looking at Cicely.

"Don't take any notice of them," she said. "Just one of their spiteful tricks, putting you in the wrong train. You're a new girl, of course?"

"Yes, I'm Cicely Jerome. I'm going into the Fourth."

"What, our Form?" asked Babs. "How splendid! Well, come along into our compartment. There'll be room if Bessie hasn't had another piece of chocolate. That's Bessie, there—"

And she pointed to the fat girl with large, round glasses.

"You're looking at the pillar-box," said the girl with the monocle. "Our one and only Bessie is in blue, but the confusion is quite permissible, what?"

Cicely's mind was in a whirl. There was such a difference between Babs and this girl and the others she had met that she was astounded.

With Babs taking her arm, she was led through a crowd of girls, some of whom smiled at her, until they came to a compartment where a girl with an Eton crop and a broad grin stood beating off all comers with a rolled-up newspaper. It was hardly elegant conduct; but then Clara Trevlyn, the tomboy of the Fourth Form, never was very elegant, as the girl who sat behind her in the compartment was explaining.

"Whoa!" called Barbara. "Friends-ease up, Clara."

"Right!" exclaimed Clara. "I've booked this giddy compartment and I'm not having any intruders in it. Where's Bessie? Tell her to come and sit inside, then there won't be room for anyone else. Bessie!" she called.

Clara stood aside, and Cicely went into

the compartment and sat down beside the other girls there, who smiled at her pleasantly. Babs and the girl with the monocle followed. Then they all called to Bessie Bunter, the fat girl.

But Bessie was standing by a slot machine inserting pennies at a rapid pace.

"Oh, the duffer!" was Clara's breezy exclamation. "She'll be ill. She's had two packets of chocolates and some raisins. I know she'll be ill. That's her last shilling, and she's changed it into pennies."

Cicely took a peep out of the window on to the noisy platform then, and saw fat Bessie putting pennies into the machine and taking out small packages as quickly as she could, while a teasing crowd was gathered about her.

"New machine!" called one girl. "New machine, please!"

"More pennies, then she'll have to pay excess in the train. Only allowed to carry a hundredweight."

"Oh, really, you girls!" blinked Bessie. "I've got jolly thin in the hols. Look at me!"

They looked, and there was more laughter, for if Bessie had got thinner she must have been extraordinarily fat to begin with, and Cicely could not help smiling. But now the guard waved excitedly, porters called, and they were scurrying for the compartments. Fat Bessie, bearing her packages, arrived breathless, and was hauled in unceremoniously by Clara, who even used the fat girl's plait to help her.

"All in?" asked Barbara.

"Yes," nodded Clara, looking round. "And one extra. Who are you?" she asked Cicely.

"Oh, a new girl—Cicely Jerome," Babs explained. "Marcia put her in the express that's just gone out—for a joke."

"Just like Marcia," shrugged Clara; and then added: "But you must have been a bit of a chump to go, you know."

Then the girl sitting next to Cicely interposed. Her voice was gentle, and she seemed to have influence over Clara.

"Oh, Clara," she protested, "she's a new girl! How can she know which train is which?"

Then Clara looked at Bessie's bundle and shrieked with laughter. Babs looked and laughed, too; so did the girl with the monocle, whom they called Jimmy, and the girl beside Cicely.

What the joke was Cicely did not see at first; and then she suddenly realised that the small packet did not contain chocolates but—matches!

"My goodness! Going to eat them all?" asked Babs gaily.

"Y-yes, rather!" said Bessie. "I shall have to, as you girls don't like this sort of chocolate."

"I'll give you a shilling if you eat the lot before Friardale," said Clara.

"And I," added Jimmy. "I'll give you a bob if you eat one packet."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, nothing to laugh at! Are you serious, Clara?"

"How can I be, duffer, at the thought of your eating that lot?"

"I m-mean, about the shilling?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Then here goes."

Bessie Bunter opened the first box, moved it into the focus of her thick glasses, and blinked dazedly.

"Oh dear! I s-say, they're matches!" she wailed dolefully. "This is a box of matches!"

They kept straight faces.

"Of course," said Jimena. "What did you think they were, Tubby? Hurry up—not much time before Friardale."

Box after box Bessie opened, and at the expression on her face there was more hilarity. It really was a scream, and Cicely joined merrily in the laughter. Bessie minded the loss of the chocolates more than the teasing.

"That was Freda's fault—Freda Foote," said Bessie wrathfully. "All right—wait until we get to Cliff House. She jolly well put a penny in that slot and pretended they were chocs!"

"Dear old Bessie," said Babs, and looked at Cicely. "This is Bessie Bunter, our prize exhibit, one of the best-hearted kids at Cliff House. But she's never had a square meal in her life. She keeps on hoping, though—"

"And she keeps on eating," chuckled Clara Trevlyn. "Still, she'll do to roll the hard courts with, that's one thing."

Talk then veered round to tennis, and Babs, whose full name was Barbara Redfern, and who proved to be the Fourth Form captain, asked Cicely if she had ever played tennis.

"On a court at home; but not very much, you know."

"Oh, well, you'll soon get practice! Hockey?" asked Barbara. "We're always looking for new talent. Never quite got over losing Mabs, really—friend of ours who left," she explained.

"I haven't really played hockey. You see, this is my first school," explained Cicely.

"What!"

They were interested in her at once, and Clara Trevlyn, for once, was slightly incredulous.

"Never been to school before?" she asked. "My hat! How strange you must feel! Not any sort of school?"

"No," blushed Cicely. "I've had governesses. You see, my grannie—I mean, my grandmother, brought me up. My people died when I was quite a baby. Only —"

"I suppose you made too much trouble for the governesses," said Barbara Redfern, with a roguish smile. "Is that it? I had one when I was little, and led her a frightful dance."

"I did lead her rather a dance, but she was a dear," confessed Cicely. "I hate leaving her—only things being as they are —"

"They packed you off to school," nodded Clara. "Good thing. Make you tough."

"Foster the Spartan spirit," said Jemima Carstairs, polishing her monocle. "Great stuff! Well, you couldn't come to a better school than Cliff House, what?"

"Rather not!"

"Best school in the country."

"We've all manner of special things," explained Barbara. "Topping studies—ripping playing-fields. And there's a gym, a swimming-bath; everything you could desire."

"Even mistresses," supplemented Marjorie Hazeldene, with a smile; "and lessons."

"Ugh, don't, Marjorie!" implored Clara. "We try to keep that side dark—especially the Bull."

"Oh, have you a bull?" asked Cicely. "What fun!"

They laughed then, and explained that the "Bull" was the nickname they gave to Miss Bullivant; and they explained that the Bull was rather a tartar. They explained her so precisely and with such a wealth of colour that Cicely could see her in imagination, a thin, gaudy woman given

to wearing blouses of dreadful and fearful patterns; a woman with a sharp tongue, more severe than just, and seeming to take a delight in punishing girls.

"Oh, dear, she doesn't sound very attractive, does she?" Cicely mused. "But I suppose there are nice ones. I suppose she's as much like the other mistresses as Marcia is like you."

They accepted the compliment with smiles. It was nice to be liked even by new girls.

"Oh, there's Janet, our very own Form mistress—she's sweet!" said Barbara. "You'll love her, and the head mistress, Miss Primrose, couldn't be better. I wouldn't swap her. But if anyone made a reasonably decent offer for the Bull—"

"There's Cliff House!" cried Clara suddenly, who had been looking eagerly out of the window. "Doesn't it look ripping in the sunshine!"

Cheers sounded along the train for Cliff House, and there were many heads peering out of the windows. Cicely was allowed a special position as she was a new girl, and she feasted her eyes on the fine building that could be seen in the distance through the trees. It was an old Tudor manor house, and spoke of Merrie England in the days of Shakespeare—soft lawns, mature trees, and a quiet simplicity that was entirely pleasing. It was a happy-looking school and Cicely, looking at it, was happy, too.

"I shall love it—I know I shall—and I shall be so happy if only—" she murmured, sitting back on to her seat.

"If only what?" smiled Barbara, putting her hand on Cicely's shoulders; and somehow that action seemed to brace Cicely. She wanted to hug Barbara for it.

"If only I can be friends with you," Cicely finished, and felt how silly and affected it must sound. Yet that was what was in her heart.

"Well, that's easy enough," said Barbara. "If that's all that's worrying you, smile!"

And Cicely smiled; but she was worried really, for Barbara did not yet know the truth. They were all of them nice to her, all of them friendly and utterly different from Marcia & Co., but they did not know the truth—that she was poor, and that she meant to be a scholarship girl. Nor dared she tell them after her experience with Marcia. A scholarship girl! Either she

would be that, or she must leave at the end of a term unless fortune smiled upon her grandmother. And would Barbara be friends with a scholarship girl, might it not be *infra dig*? Were scholarship girls at Cliff House treated as paupers—as things apart?

The train slowed up, there was a bustle to get luggage down from the rack, and Cicely was near to Barbara. She fought to tell what she judged to be her guilty secret, but she dared not.

"Tumble out——"

"Run for a cab, Clara!"

"Porter! Porter!"

Once again Cicely was in the mob of excited girls, but this time Barbara was beside her, and Barbara was showing her the ropes, just as though they were the closest of pals. How Cicely dreaded the moment when that hand might drop, when Barbara might turn her back upon her! And then she saw Marcia and Gwen sneering at her, and overheard their whispers.

"I'll pay her out—crawling up to Babs."

"But Babs doesn't know she wants to be a scholarship girl, Marcia."

Marcia laughed unpleasantly.

"I'll make her wish she were back with her grannie—and before to-night, too."

That was all Cicely heard, but it was enough to send her heart down into her shoes, and bring a heavy black shadow across the sunniness that had come into her life.

CHAPTER 3.

The Shadow of Unhappiness.

OUTSIDE the station at Friar-dale there was confusion. There were only three cabs, but there were crowds of girls. There was a huge charabanc that had been awaiting them, and in that they were supposed to travel. But that fact only made the girls more eager to ride in a cab.

Clara Trevlyn, who had rushed out of the station first, had reserved one for the Co., and as usual she managed to ward off all those who wanted it—and there were many.

Cicely, with Barbara holding her arm, pushed her way out of the crowd, smiling broadly, forgetting Marcia and Gwen and their unpleasantness in this new excitement.

"Look, there's a monitress wanting a cab," said Barbara, and pointed to Stella

Stone, the school captain, who was in the station booking-hall with her luggage, being surrounded by girls and asked what sort of holiday she had spent, and where she had been.

"But we're taking it," nodded Cicely.

"Good. What a dear old horse!"

"That's Nobby," said Barbara. "He'll be a hundred and something next week! He was in the charge of the Light Brigade and the Battle of Waterloo, and they say that his mother was Black Bess who took Dick Turpin to York."

They all managed to crowd in, and Clara, making a sort of trumpet out of rolled-up paper, pretended that it was a coach and four. It made enough noise for ten as it went down the station yard into the lane.

No one minded the crush inside, hot and stuffy though it was, and they were all anxious and eager for the first close view of the old school. There was argument about studies, too, and whether they had been done up, and who was to have which.

They talked incessantly all the way, and although Cicely knew few of the people they discussed she soon managed to pick up hints.

Cliff House at last! The long, low wall came into sight, and first the specially low portion at the end of the headmistress' garden, where girls who preferred going to dances, or the second house at the pictures, climbed over into the roadway. Then the longer wall that ended in the imposing gateway where the school porter stood beaming.

"I'm sure I shall enjoy being here," muttered Cicely, as she gazed at the picturesque school buildings. But all the while she was wondering what the girls would say when they learnt that she would be a scholarship girl.

Piper, the porter, was cheered, as everything else was cheered at the beginning of term, and then Bessie Bunter fought to get a view of the tuck-shop which nestled snugly under a tree in the corner of the quadrangle, and was certainly well worth looking at.

But Cicely was looking at the school building itself, with its quaint old roof, and the latticed windows, and great oaken supports.

"That's our Form-room window," Clara pointed out. "Clara—fifty lines for look-

ing out of window!" and she chuckled. "Wonder how I shall earn my first lines?" she asked.

"You won't be long," Barbara assured her. "First day as usual."

The cab came to a standstill, and they all patted the horse before grabbing their bags and departing, it being left to Barbara to settle the fare, the rest dividing up as usual afterwards.

"This is the hall," said Clara, standing in the doorway. "This is where Miss Prim says a few mouthfuls on occasion—and—ahem!"

"Clara!" said a stern voice.

Cicely gave a jump and a gasp.

"The Bull!" she murmured, recognising the mistress from the others' vivid description of her.

Miss Bullivant it was, stern and grim, with gleaming glasses and a perfectly ferocious blouse that made Jemima pass a hand across her eyes.

"Oh, I didn't see you, Miss Bullivant," said Clara. "I hope you had a good holiday and good bathing—"

"I had a very good holiday," said Miss Bullivant stiffly. "But I trust you will remember that the holidays are finished. Begin school quietly, Clara, unless you wish to be punished."

Clara went upstairs after that, on exaggerated tiptoes, amidst sniggers from the others, and Cicely followed. She was beginning to like tomboy Clara, and she felt that the Bull, although stern, would be rather fun.

"Our cosy little home," explained Clara, opening a study door.

"But not when you are playing the ukulele, sweetest," said Jemima gently.

"And let me see," added Clara. "We drew lots for studies because we can't get into one. I'm with Jimmy and Marjorie as of yore, isn't that it, Babs, in No. 7?"

"Right!" nodded Barbara. "And Bessie and I in No. 4—and, oh—Miss Matthews."

"Janey," said the irrepressible Clara.

A youthful mistress had emerged from one of the studies. She was pretty, and her face bore a charming smile. Cicely looked her at once. She looked so kind, and so attractive, quite the reverse of Miss Bullivant.

"Oh, Barbara," said Miss Matthews after she had answered their solicitous inquiries concerning her holidays, and been told a few

of their adventures, "there's a new girl in our Form, and because she has never been to school before I want you to look after her. It was either you or Marjorie and Gwen—so—well—"

"Is it Cicely?" asked Barbara eagerly. "Because, if so, we've already met her. This is Cicely."

Miss Matthews smiled at Cicely and patted her shoulder.

"Why, yes, Cicely Jerome. How do you do? Very glad to know that you are in my Form. You will get on with Barbara I'm sure. Study No. 4; and now I must really go down and see to things!"

She hurried down the stairs and Clara gave a faint cheer. Cicely was looking after the mistress admiringly; but she turned to Barbara, hardly able to control her excitement.

"I—I'm in your study?" she gasped. "It can't be true?"

"But it is," said Barbara gaily. "Splendid. That'll make three of us. Come along and see how you like it."

She took Cicely by the hand and dragged her along the corridor, past fleeting glimpses of cosy little dens all newly decorated, and then to a study which bore a number 4 on the door.

"Home!" exclaimed Barbara ecstatically. "Home sweet home!"

"Looks topping," said Clara. "Freshly decorated and painted. But same old deu really. There's the picture of Mabs—good old Mabs."

"Yes," said Barbara, and it seemed to Cicely that a shade crossed her face. "I shall miss Mabs. She was my best chum—"

And how Cicely wished in her heart that she could take Mabs' place.

Barbara Redfern looked at Cicely brightly. "Still, we shall be a three-some," she added.

"I'll try to make up for Mabs," said Cicely. "She looks a ripping sort of girl in the photo—so jolly."

"She was," said Barbara, a slight catch in her voice. "Ripping pal. I thought she might be coming back to us again—but there—can't be helped. Throw your bag down. You can hang up any photographs you like, you know—do anything you like. It's as much your own room as ours. Make it home."

"I will, rather!" said Cicely gladly.

"I'll go and get some cakes," squealed Bessie. "How many, Babs?"

"Oh, two shillings' worth," said Barbara Redfern. "Here—catch!"

She tossed Bessie a coin and then—then she and Cicely were alone in the study, and Cicely felt suddenly shy and guilty.

"Oh, I say, Barbara," she began. "I—I feel I'm here under false pretences. I feel you ought to know—"

"False pretences? Why, what do you mean, Cicely?"

Barbara turned to her in surprise. Cicely looked down, blushed, and then met Barbara's eyes.

"You see, I'm poor really, and if I have any luck I—I shall be a scholarship girl here," she faltered, and waited for the blow to fall.

"A scholarship girl?" said Barbara.

"Yes, I ought to have told you before, but I was frightened to. I know it was wrong."

Barbara looked amazed.

"Frightened to—but why? What's wrong with being a scholarship girl, for goodness' sake? Peggy Preston was when she came. Shows a girl is jolly clever, I think, and has pluck. I couldn't win one."

"I haven't—but my grannie has lost her money, you see, because some wretched man—well, the money was badly invested or something and grannie is ruined and our home sold up and the dogs and my pony—and—" She pulled herself together and fought back tears.

"Why, you silly kid," was Barbara's sympathetic cry. "You don't think anyone would while would think less of you for that?"

"No, but Marcia said—"

"Oh, Marcia!" And what ringing scorn there was in Barbara's tone. "Marcia doesn't matter here. You and I are going to be friends—all of us. Don't you dare say anything more about that! Goodness! It's suggesting I'm as bad as Marcia."

"Then I'm sorry. Oh, dear, I'm so happy," said Cicely. "I want to hug you for being such a dear, and I want to write to grannie and tell her that it's lovely here, better than ever I expected in my wildest dreams."

"Right—ho. Scribble a note to catch this post," said Barbara quickly. "Do it while I'm getting tea."

So Cicely took some notepaper and a pen and with happiness in her heart sat

down to write a gay note to her grandmother, full of optimism about her future.

And while she was writing, Bessie came back with the cakes.

Marjorie came in with a tea-cloth and some china, and Clara bustled about to get boiling water to make tea.

The table was laid, tea was made and the chairs were just being arranged, when the door banged unceremoniously open and a girl entered, a bag in her hand, hat on the back of her head, her face wearing a broad smile.

What a commotion there was—what a surprise, amazed, delighted chorus!

"Mabs!"

"It can't be—it can't be!" gasped Barbara, standing petrified. "It's not Mabs, it's her ghost."

But the girl entered the study, dropped her bag and flung her arms round Barbara's neck.

"It is Mabs—and I'm back for this term, at least," she said. "Daddy decided last night. What do you think of that—quick decision—but daddy's been making a fortune, and I'm to come to school for this term and take up acting again afterwards—and oh, heaps of things!"

She and Barbara waltzed round and round while Cicely stood by unheeded. Handshakes there were, and kisses and skipping for joy and great excitement, Mabel back again—dear old Mabs! No wonder there was excitement! And then Barbara remembered Cicely.

"Oh, Mabs," she said. "Meet Cicely, a new girl—Cicely Jerome."

Barbara made a sweeping gesture in Cicely's direction, smiling, and Mabel, looking the cheeriest girl in the world, held out her hand welcoming.

"And this is Mabs, our Mabs—Mabel Lynn of Lynn's Folly, Carthley, Essex," said Barbara.

Cicely had moved a step forward, but at Barbara's words the welcoming smile went from her face, and her right hand dropped to her side.

Mabel Lynn of Lynn's Folly, Barbara had said, and it flashed upon Cicely now; Mr. Lynn of Carthley it was who had been responsible for the loss of her grandmother's money—and now Mr. Lynn himself had suddenly secured a fortune!

This was the daughter of the man who had ruined her grandmother! That was enough for Cicely, and with tightened lips

she half-turned towards the door. The laughter and merriment in the study died away, and the assembled Fourth-Formers stared at Cicely in amazement.

And Mabel Lynn, the happy smile gone from her face, dropped her hand to her side, rebuffed, slighted, and in front of all her friends—scorned by a new girl!

CHAPTER 4.

Jemima Intervenes.

JEMIMA CARSTAIRS it was who broke the awful silence that had fallen, and Cicely was immensely grateful to her.

Jemima spoke quite casually, and it would have been difficult to tell by her manner that she thought anything out of the way had happened. She turned to Mabel Lynn.

"Well, well, and how was the acting, Mabs?" she asked.

Mabel Lynn seemed to come out of a trance, she seemed to give herself a shake, and thus remove the queer frown that had settled on her brow and disperse her general air of hurt surprise.

"Oh, it was great! Wonderful! And yet, you know, I'm glad to be back with you all, I am, really! It's too marvellous! The dear old study! Same faces."

Cicely Jerome stepped to the door. No one seemed to be noticing her, and yet she knew that they would all discuss her the moment that she went from the study. That could not be helped. It was the only natural thing for them to do.

Yet her knowledge that it would happen made her loiter, her hand upon the knob of the door, while Clara Trevlyn and Marjorie Hazeldene returned to their tasks, and there was such a babel of talk that surely no one was listening to what anyone else was saying. The newcomer was the centre of it all, the girl with the bobbed hair, bright eyes, and fair face.

So this was Mabel Lynn. This was the daughter of the man who had robbed her grannie of her fortune. No sign of baseness in her face; but then, had not grannie trusted Mr. Lynn, Mabel's father? And had he not proved a swindler?

Sick at heart, unable to stay there any longer, not wanted, and in the company of Mabel Lynn, Cicely opened the door and went out into the corridor.

A moment before it had seemed to her that she was quite at home. Only a moment ago she had been friendly with Barbara, had been one of the "set," and what ages ago that seemed, for now she was only a new girl, just like any other, a stranger in a foreign land.

Cicely walked on down the corridor. Several study doors were open, and she had glimpses of bright rooms, with flowers and gay cretonne curtains, with books lying higgledy-piggledy, and smiling faces everywhere.

Apparently they were all quite glad to get back; evidently Cliff House was really a jolly place. But to Cicely, at the moment, it was as friendless as the North Pole. Where could she go if she had no study—except that one where Mabel Lynn was?

In her hand she still held the letter that she had been writing to her grandmother. The ink of the last sentence was still wet, and she glanced at it, her eyes misty.

"I have made new friends already, and I'm so deliciously happy. It's going to be marvellous here, it is, really—"

That was the last sentence she had written so lightheartedly—and meant every word of it. But now it was a lie. Had she made friends? Would Barbara Redfern be chums with a girl who had slighted her special chum? How could she be?

"Oh, dear! What can I do?"

Cicely tore the letter slowly across, as though not certain that she might not be able to send it. Finally, she tore it into four pieces and crushed them in her hand.

Having nowhere to go, she stood in the corridor, looking out of one of the windows in a small alcove. The window gave a view of the great spreading lawns, and the small tuckshop secreted in the corner of the quadrangle.

The special Cliff House motor-coach came through the school gates at that moment, filled with laughing, merry girls, and piled with luggage. A cab followed it, a private car, and one or two girls on foot. Cliff House was filling up; it was like a hungry giant having a meal, but it was by no means even agreeable now to Cicely.

With a sigh, she turned from the window, and then she had the shock of her life as she saw two girls standing side by

side, cycling her. They were Marcia Loftus and Gwen Cook.

"Hallo, here she is!" said Marcia.

"Thrown out already! Ha, ha, ha!"

"So they've bowled you out? Thought it wouldn't be long!" jeered Gwen.

Cicely tilted her head, and a gleam came into her eyes.

"I haven't been bowled out or thrown out," she said steadily. "I—I am just taking a look at the school."

"Glad you won the scholarship?" asked Marcia.

Cicely made a convulsive movement with the hand that held the torn-up letter, and there seemed to be a queer lump in her throat. She simply had to say something, or else she would cry.

"I'm going down to tea now," she said.

Marcia hugged Gwen, and both girls looked as mischievous as monkeys.

"She's going to tea," said Gwen. "Well, my goodness! Isn't it sweet of her to tell us that? Not having it with Babs?"

"No."

"Even though it's your study. I happen to know that," said Marcia, who made it her business, apparently, to know everything.

Cicely bit her lip. She saw at once how hard it was going to be to make girls understand her true position. She could not tell them what she felt about Mabel; she could not accuse Mabel Lynn's father of robbing her grandmother, for had not grannie warned her against that? Grannie had said something about slander, and had hinted that it would be a very serious thing to mention a definite charge against someone, mentioning names.

"If you're going to have tea, you'd better go," said Marcia. "Poor girls have tea in Hall, you know. Thick bread-and-butter, a look at the jam, and tea you could cut up into chunks." Then she turned to Gwen. "We'd better not be seen with her, had we?"

"Better not," said Gwen. "Don't tell the girls we've been speaking to you, Cicely, will you? Come on, Marcia!"

They walked off quickly, and Cicely, after giving them a moment's start, followed down the corridor and on to the circus. There she paused, for the Hall seemed to be crowded with girls, and never had she seen such commotion and excitement.

Girls were mounting the stairs now, bumping past her, utterly heedless. They didn't seem to notice she was there.

They passed up the stairs, having given Cicely only a glance. If they had looked closely they would have seen how pale she was, and that her eyes were glistening with tears. They would not have guessed why, because it would have been hard to guess that a new girl had actually had a chance of sharing a study with the great Barbara. Why, there were girls already in the Fourth who would have given all they possessed for that.

Cicely did not need to be told of that fact, either. She could guess it quite easily when she heard them all talking and chatting.

"Babs." That was the name on every lip, and she, Cicely, had had a chance to be Barbara's friend—her study companion; and now she had thrown that chance away wilfully, and of her own accord!

"Oh, what a fool I am! Oh, why had Mabel to come back—oh, why—"

She stumbled a little blindly down the stairs, and stood by the girls in the Hall, inconspicuous, a girl of no account whatever, but taking in everything she saw.

A girl rather older than most of them there, a girl of about seventeen, had entered and was looking about her, having put down her hockey-stick and tennis-racket and bag in the Hall.

"Phew! It's hot!" she said, and then looked about her.

Her eyes fell upon Cicely, who moved slightly under the scrutiny.

"New kid?" she asked.

"Y-es. I am new here," said Cicely, while most of the girls turned for a moment to stare at her.

"Good! Take this bag and these other things up to my study—and be smart about it!" said the girl.

One or two of the others twittered.

"Your fag, Connie?"

"She'll do for the time being," said Connie Jackson. "Hurry up! Smart about it! Across the Hall, there, Sixth-Form corridor. Come along, do!" she snapped. "Pull yourself together!"

Cicely jumped to life. Connie was obviously a person of some importance, a monitor, perhaps, and she knew that monitors were allowed fags. So she picked

up the bag and gathered together the other things, although the bag seemed to be filled with lead.

But it so happened that she was not to carry that bag, for suddenly she felt a tap on her shoulder, and looked round.

"Cherchio! Been looking for you every-where. You're missing tea," said a cheery voice; and Cicely found herself looking into the pleasant grey eyes of the girl they called Jimmy, the girl with a monocle, Jemima Carstairs.

"I have to carry this bag for—er—Connie," she said.

"Yes, get on with it!" snapped Connie.

Jemima Carstairs surveyed Connie through her monocle, and shook her head.

"Can't allow it," she said. "Sorry and all that, Connie. But it can't be done, you know."

The talk amongst the girls near by ceased, and Connie, Cicely noticed, went crimson with rage, her eyes seeming to start out of her head.

"What! How dare you, Jemima? I have just ordered that new girl to carry my bag."

"But Cicely's one of us, in the Fourth, you know," said Jemima gently, "and the Fourth can't be fagged—even by monitresses. Of course, as a special favour I dare say we might stretch a point, and any girl in the Fourth who really and truly loved you, Connie—" said Jemima gently, and was interrupted by a laugh.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Connie clenched her hands and looked as though she were trembling with anger. Cicely took up the bag and then stepped forward.

"Let me take it," she whispered to Jemima.

"Not under orders, cherub. Here's Marcia—and Gwen. Marcia—Gwen," said Jemima, "Connie wants a favour done."

Marcia and Gwen came at a run. They always toadied round monitresses and sought to curry favour so that they might have special privileges. It was not a scheme which worked with most monitresses, but it did with Connie, who liked to hear keyhole information of wrongdoing, and gave passes-out in return.

"Oh, yes, Connie," said Marcia.

"Of course, Connie dear!" fawned Gwen. Jemima's face wore an amused smile, and Cicely stepped away from the bag,

while Connie Jackson gave Jemima a look of deep hatred, and then indicated her bag.

"Would you be good enough to carry my bag?" she asked Marcia. "Just to my study."

What a come-down it was; and how taken aback Marcia and Gwen were! Marcia left it to Gwen, Gwen left it to Marcia. This was not the sort of thing they had quite expected, but they saw Connie's look, and so Marcia took the bag and Gwen the racket and hockey-stick and coats.

Jemima bowed.

"Any time, day or night," she said to Connie. "By special request our expert portresses are at your service—"

But Connie threw up her head and walked away, and the others in the Hall recommenced their chatter. Then Jemima looked at Cicely and took her arm.

"Now," she said, "this is the way, up the stairs, my cherub, and to tea!"

CHAPTER 5.

The Lonely Furrow.

CICELY had liked Jemima Carstairs from the first. There was something about Jemima that most people liked, although, of course, there were such girls as Connie Jackson of the Sixth who were exceptions to the rule. Miss Bullivant was another exception, as Cicely would find out later; but then Jemima was so smart, and Miss Bullivant so dowdy, and Jemima so obviously did not "care a hang" for Miss Bullivant's most cutting remarks.

With her sleek, Eton-cropped hair and her slim, boyish figure, Jemima stood out in any crowd. Now, as Cicely looked fixedly at her, she dived her hands into the short school blazer she wore, her monocle dangling at the end of its black cord, and smiled.

"Want to post your letter—what?" she asked.

Cicely shook her head, and held her letter more tightly. She had been frightened lest she dropped it when she took Connie's things, but she had it still crushed tightly in her hand.

"No. I've changed my mind."

"Not writing home to-night?"

"I—I don't know. I may. But not quite the same letter. Because—well, you saw how it was," she added, and blushed.

Jemima took up her monocle and screwed it home thoughtfully.

"Meaning Mabel?" she said.

Cicely walked on for a moment or two in silence, looking down at the floor and kicking with her toes at the carpet.

"Yes, meaning Mabel," she agreed, and met Jemima's eyes.

"Why? Mabs is a darling. You'll like Mabs—good old British breed, you know, tough as leather, jolly as fun and all that. She's our star actress, and now she's back we'll simply have to do a play or something. You'll have to take part."

"I? But I can't act. And besides, you don't seem to understand. I mean— Oh, I can't explain," said Cicely wretchedly. "It's so difficult—and horrid. But you see—Mabel—well, it isn't me only—it's a sort of feud."

"A sort of feud?" Jemima asked. Then her eyes twinkled. "It's not a vendetta, or whatever they call them, that they have in Corsica, or somewhere, where one family blots out another completely? You haven't vowed a frightful vow to blot out all the Lynns?"

Cicely gave a short, unreal little laugh.

"Of course not. Only perhaps it is something like a vendetta. A sort of feud, in a way. And so it's quite impossible. I can't be friends with Mabel Lynn."

"Oh!" said Jemima, and stroked her chin thoughtfully. "But Mabel is Barbara's best friend. Don't you want to be friends with Babs?"

Cicely swallowed a lump in her throat.

"Who wouldn't? My goodness, it's the greatest thing I want! I will be friends with Babs!"

"Must be with both or neither. Love me love my dog sort of thing," said Jemima, shaking her head.

"But perhaps they won't always be friends. Perhaps Barbara will find her out. Perhaps I can—perhaps—" she ended lamely.

Jemima put her hand on Cicely's shoulder.

"My dear beloved," she said, "it can't be done, you know. You can't part Babs and Mabs; and I'm not at all sure that it would be the right and proper thing, anyway."

"Oh, I didn't mean quite that!" said

Cicely, in confusion. "That would be horrid. Oh, you won't let them know I said that?" she pleaded, and came to a halt.

She looked into Jemima's eyes, and knew that here was a girl she could trust. It seemed as though she had known Jemima for a long time, for years almost, so friendly was she.

"Tell them? Of course not," was Jemima's ready assurance.

They were standing on the landing now, and in a moment a decision would have to be made, because the Fourth-Form corridor was in front of them. Either Cicely was going back to Study No. 7 or not.

"We can't talk here," said Cicely anxiously. "And I want you to understand—I do, really. The little alcove!"

So to the little alcove they went, and really that was the worst thing they could have done, for Marcia and Gwen were mounting the stairs now in a very bad temper, having carried Connie's bag, and only been rewarded by the curtest thanks, in such a bad mood was Connie.

"You want to be friends with Babs and not with Mabs, is that it?" Jemima asked quietly.

"Yes. But I don't want to be an enemy—not a real enemy, exactly. I haven't thought it out," said Cicely miserably, "just what I am going to be. Only I know I can't be real friends—not possibly."

"As long as you don't want to part them," said Jemima, "that's all right. But couldn't you take a hearty stab at it—try to be friends?"

"No."

"Well, I'm sorry," sighed Jemima. "It's tough, beginning school life meaning not to be friends with anyone; and it'll be hard when that person is Mabs, because she's so popular. You'll be out of things."

"Oh, must I be?"

"Afraid so. Mabs will forget the fact that you didn't take her hand, so come on and try to be friends."

Jemima took her gently by the arm, but Cicely did not move.

"I can't—I can't!" she said, in low tones. "It's impossible!"

And at the end of the corridor, Gwen and Marcia, standing close together, exchanged glances, hearing the voices. They made no sound. They just listened intently.

"Then we'll have to leave it at that,"

CHAPTER 6.

To Spite the New Girl.

said Jemima slowly. "But don't try to part them. You'll never succeed, and it would be rather a low thing to do—what?"

"Hateful! You don't think that of me? I wouldn't really try to part Babs and this girl Mabel, but—oh, goodness, if—"

"If only a miracle happened and they were parted!" said Jemima, smiling faintly, as she finished that sentence for Cicely.

Cicely did not answer, but Marcia gave Gwen a queer, eager look, which Gwen understandingly returned. This was news for them indeed! This was something worth hearing, and it was not often they heard anything even mildly interesting from keyholes or through half-open doors!

They did not speak, for Jemima was speaking again. But they had heard all that they were going to regarding Cicely's secret, for Jemima talked of tea.

"You'll have to have tea somewhere," she pointed out. "Trot into our study, No. 7, and make yourself quite at home. Have you any change? If so, the tuckshop is over in the corner, and you could have tea there—it's allowed. And if you want to write home, there's pen, ink, paper, etc., in my study, on top of the bookcase. But dust it, because it's been there all the hols.. And now—cheerio!"

Cicely watched Jemima go, and her heart sank, for now she had made her decision. Jemima had been sent as an emissary, no doubt, and she had failed. There would be no need to tell Barbara or the others now; they would know.

With a heart as heavy as lead, she turned away to go down to the tuckshop, and at the same moment Marcia and Gwen appeared in view in the corridor. If Cicely had looked at them at all keenly she might have noticed that they looked guilty; but she did not.

"Why, here's the scholarship kid," said Marcia. "And crying, too. Look at the tears!"

"Thinking of grannie and her aunt the earl!" scoffed Gwen. "And—hallo!"

Cicely did not turn, even though she heard that exclamation: she was too busy trying to stem her tears and dab them from her cheeks. But if she had turned she would have seen Gwen give a quick, furtive look back, and then stoop to the ground to pick up some fallen pieces of paper—pieces of Cicely's unposted letter!

MARCIA LOFTUS and Gwen Cook had decided on a feed on their own.

Marcia Loftus had a pot of jam, a cake, and a plate of bread-and-butter. Gwen had a tongue and a cold chicken, and a bottle of ginger-beer.

Marcia and Gwen saw no reason why they should share their things with anyone else, and it was Marcia who suggested the dormitory.

"Because," she said, "I want to look at Mabel's new case and the new dresses—"

"Yes, and that scent," nodded Gwen. "I'd like to take a little of that. We can fill the bottle up with water so that she won't know."

Marcia agreed to that readily. It was stealing, but Marcia did not work things out as closely as that.

So she and Gwen stole up to the dormitory. The dormitory was, of course, deserted, and as dusk was falling they would not be seen by anyone who chanced to look in, but they would have sufficient light for their purpose.

Mabel Lynn's new dressing-case was beside her bed, and several of the new dresses lay on the bed itself.

"Phew! Lovely dresses!" said Gwen. "Wish they were mine, Marcia!"

"Poof! No better than my new ones," said Marcia loftily, although there was envy and bitterness in her heart. "Just like Mabel to swank about them."

"Well, she didn't, really," said Gwen. "The others made her show them. And this lovely dressing-case—isn't it fine?"

It was a splendid crocodile case, beautifully lined and fitted. There was every conceivable necessity there, and a good deal more. Marcia and Gwen took out each article and examined it minutely.

"Some girls have all the luck—and money," grumbled Marcia. "Her father must be rich now to sling presents like this about."

"Probably got it dishonestly," said Gwen. "I wouldn't like to have it on my conscience that I'd been ruining people, would you?"

"No fear. But I wouldn't mind that case," mused Marcia, as she ate some chicken.

There was a thoughtful look in her eyes which constantly roved in the direction of the dresses on the bed.

"Want to try one on?" asked Gwen slyly. "I wouldn't mind—if you did."

Marcia reflected.

"She might come up, and there'd be a frightful scene. You know how Miss Prim hates girls wearing one another's dresses! Not that she'd know—it'd only take a minute."

She rose to her feet and took up one of the dresses, holding it against herself. It was a great temptation to her, being a pretty frock, and more expensive, despite her boasting, than any she was likely to own. But Marcia was not a girl who liked to be alone in a scrape, so she held out a dress to Gwen.

"Try that one."

"Are you going to try that?"

"Yes."

"Well, go on, then."

"You go on. You start—"

There was a pause, then they both slipped off their own dresses, and a moment later Marcia and Gwen were posing in two of Mabel Lynn's new frocks, and feeling that they looked so much better in them than Mabel could ever do that it was a shame they were hers at all.

"Suits me, doesn't it, Gwen?"

"My style altogether, isn't it, Marcia?"

But, of course, they were not very much interested in how each other looked. It was themselves that mattered.

Marcia went to the dressing-case and took out a hairbrush to tidy her rather loose, untidy crop; Gwen picked up what appeared to be a leather-covered scent-bottle.

"Can't get it open," she said. "Tiny, isn't it?"

"Something expensive," said Marcia eagerly. "Sprinkle some on my hair, Gwen."

"When I get it open," promised Gwen, fiddling.

"Well, let me try. There's a spring button, you silly—"

Gwen snatched back and Marcia snatched, and then the spring opened.

"Oh, look out!"

Out came a stream of liquid over Marcia's dress. Gwen, in horror, whipped back her hand, and some of the liquid went on to her own dress.

In terror both of them stood quite still,

white-faced, staring in mutual recrimination.

"Oh, you idiot!" fumed Marcia.

"You silly duffer!" said Gwen furiously.

Then both of them dabbed at their dresses, under the impression in the gathering gloom that it was scent they had spilled. But it was not, as Marcia was the first to discover.

"Doesn't smell much—the stain will dry out," said Marcia, dabbing at it. "And—Oh goodness! Oh, Gwen, it's ink!"

"Ink?"

Gwen fell back a step and collapsed on to the nearest bed, staring dazedly down at her dress, while Marcia stared at her open-eyed. Recovering herself then, she snatched up the small leather-covered bottle and examined it. Ink it certainly was. That thoroughly-equipped dressing-case held a writing-pad and a bottle of ink!

"Oh, what are we going to do?"

"Don't ask me. It was your fault, you idiot!"

"It wasn't. You opened it. It was you who struggled. You'll have to tell her."

"Tell Mabel!" gasped Marcia. "Don't be mad! My goodness—she mustn't know."

Gwen made a despairing gesture and then frantically tore off the dress.

"How can she possibly help knowing? She must know. We can't get the stains out in time—if ever. The dresses are ruined!"

"And oh, look! In the suit-case, too!" she added as she struck a match to ascertain the full extent of the damage.

By the dying light of the match, which illuminated their white faces, the two girls exchanged accusing looks. But they knew that they would have to share the blame—that there was no way out.

"Anyway, she can't think we did it on purpose," said Marcia in relief. "That's something. It was a pure accident."

"If she'll believe us!" said Gwen.

"Well, she believed about Cicely—and—" Marcia broke off, and looked meaningly at Gwen.

"She wouldn't believe it had been an accident if Cicely had done it," said Gwen quickly, and looking at Marcia rather queerly.

"No," murmured Marcia as the match died out and Gwen flung it away. "In fact, Gwen, I rather think that if Mabel

found out—if no one told her—she'd rather think Cicely had done it."

"Oh! Yes, I suppose she would," said Gwen, just as though that idea had not occurred to her a moment previously. "I suppose she would. It's just what that kid would do, too."

"Of course she would," agreed Marcia, taking off her dress. "I'm not going to say anything. Let Mabs find out—put the dresses back—leave the suit-case open."

"Better clear up the crumbs," said Gwen. "I'll light a candle. You go to the door—quickly!"

Marcia went to the door to keep watch, and Gwen cleared up all traces of their repast, and hid the remainder of the food in a case under her own bed. That done, there remained nothing to prove that they had been in the dormitory at all. And, of course, they wanted no proof of that sort lying about!

"All right?" asked Marcia from the door.

"Yes—no one about. Come and look, then."

Marcia made a survey of the floor and grinned in an evil way.

"My hat! Shock for Mabel—and perhaps for that Cicely, eh? We owe her one."

"I should think we do. Only a scholarship kid. I dare say she'd have done it out of revenge if she'd thought of it."

Marcia and Gwen went silently, secretly out of the dormitory, and down the stairs. There was a light on the lower landing, and there was some noise coming from the Fourth-Form corridor. The Fourth were having a feast in honour of Mabel Lynn's return. Some of the girls had tables in the corridor itself; others were in the doorways of their studies.

"Better find Cicely," whispered Gwen.

"Yes—in case she's in the corridor, eh?"

They did not mean to make themselves prominent in the corridor, so Marcia Loftus, standing directly on the landing, switched off the corridor light, and then, with Gwen following her, ran along softly to their study, passing on the way girls who rushed to put on the light.

"Third-Formers—or Fifth."

"Or that Cicely girl."

There were muttered sounds and squeals in the darkness. Someone dropped a glass; someone clutched at Bessie Bunter, who shrieked, and then on came the light, to

find Marcia and Gwen in their study, hearts beating quickly, but feeling safe.

Marcia went at once to the door.

"Who put out the light?" she demanded angrily. "I've spilled something down my sleeve!"

"Goodness knows," said Barbara, "but never mind. There is no one in sight. Better go and see, Marcia."

"Chase 'em off, Marcia, good dog," added Clara. "Woof, woof!"

"Probably that girl Cicely," Marcia said. "I'll pull her hair!"

She ran down the corridor, with all the appearance of a girl who had been inconvenienced by the turning out of the lights, and on the landing she looked about her. No one, she knew, would have worried much to discover where she and Gwen had been, and they could all think they had been in their study the whole time. That was sufficient alibi. Now she had to find Cicely.

Cicely was not at all difficult to find. She was down in the hall, sitting miserably in an alcove, looking out of the window. It was too dark to read, although she had a magazine in her hand, and she did not know where the light switch was.

"Oh, here you are," said Marcia. "You young scamp! Did you turn out the light on our landing?" she asked threateningly.

"I?" asked Cicely, turning, and it was obvious that she had been crying. "No. Why should I?"

"Oh, well, you'd do anything to spite Mabel Lynn!"

"That isn't true, Marcia. I don't want to be her friend, but I certainly shan't be her—her enemy."

Marcia was a little taken back.

"Oh, indeed," she said. "And what's the difference, pray?"

Cicely shrugged her shoulders. She did not feel inclined to describe that subtle difference to a girl who was not at all likely to bring understanding to her aid. She did not care a row of pins what Marcia thought, and she turned back to the window.

Marcia laughed.

"Wait until you come into the dorm, that's all."

She walked away then, and up the stairs a moment before the lights were turned on. But she paused on the Fourth-Form landing to watch. She saw Cicely continue to

look out of the window, and knew that it would not be long before that girl decided that bed would perhaps be the best place for her, since she was an outcast.

Marcia proved to be right.

It was Stella Stone who turned on the light in the hall, and she saw Cicely, and crossed to her.

"Hallo, kid," she said kindly. "All alone? Why don't you go up to your study?"

Cicely tried to make her voice sound level, and fought back the tears.

"I—I was thinking of going to bed. I'm rather tired, and—only I don't know where it is."

"I'll show you the way up," said Stella. "Come on—and don't be home-sick, kiddie! You'll soon feel friendly with the others. Cheer up! You know, Cliff House is a first-class place if you let it be. Give your best, and you'll get it back."

And Stella, like the brick she was, took Cicely's arm, and led her up the stairs. Bravely Cicely fought back the tears—tears that were of gratitude rather than misery, for this kindness touched her heart.

At the corridor that led to the Fourth-Form dormitory Stella left her.

"Just at the end—that door—that's right," she said. "And sleep well. Yours will be the bed the third from the door. Third, remember."

Cicely waved good-night, and in the darkness blew Stella a kiss; then she found the third bed in the darkness, and undressed rapidly.

Under the bed her suit-case had been placed, and she got out her night clothes and slipped into them. Here at last, she felt, was safety.

But, alas! Farther down the dormitory, on Mabel's bed, lay those dresses stained with ink. What could Mabel think when she entered but that someone had tampered with her dresses? And who would be likely to do that but the girl who seemed to have such a strange and inexplicable "down" on her?

CHAPTER 7.

False Evidences!

"HALLO, early bird!" commented Barbara Redfern as, entering the dormitory with the others, she noticed Cicely in bed.

"Sulks," added Clara Trevlyn, with a

faint yawn. "But I haven't much sympathy with her, myself, I must say."

They were all of them tired, and most of them were humming tunes of songs as they had been in the Fourth-Form corridor after their merry evening. They were still in the mood for fun, and they grouped around Cicely's bed.

Freda Foote was well to the fore, being funny as usual.

"Sleep, ba-c-by," chanted Freda. "Sleep, light-ly! Hasn't she a lovely expression in sleep, girls? Looks like a tadpole!"

"Look at her nose!" laughed Phyllis Howell. "See the nostrils moving slightly

"Then watch them move more," urged Freda.

There was suppressed laughter then as the humorist of the Form approached Cicely's bed with a piece of cotton, and very gently tickled the sleeper's nostrils. It was the sort of trick that Freda loved to play.

Cicely, being then soundly asleep, just shook her head, and the laughter became a little less suppressed.

"He—he—it's making her dream," sniggered Bessie Bunter.

"Dreaming of her grandmamma!" jeered Marcia Loftus, "and of the wonderful house she once had. She thinks it's her pony. Make a whining noise, Freda."

"Oh, let the kid sleep," laughed Barbara Redfern. "Come and get into bed before a monitress comes up. We shall lose our beauty sleep."

"Pooh! I can afford to waste mine!" retorted Freda facetiously.

But Marcia, feeling that events were moving too slowly, joggled Freda's arm, and Cicely awoke with a start, rubbed her nose, and glanced quickly about her, obviously surprised.

"Something tickled my nose," she said, and then caught sight of Freda's piece of cotton, and smiled ruefully. "Oh, it was you, was it? I was just dreaming of home, too!"

Freda started to sing "The dream of home" in a falsetto voice, but Barbara dragged her away.

"Yes, let's get into bed," yawned Mabel Lynn. "And get some—oh, goodness!"

Mabel stood riveted to the floor in the middle of the dormitory, staring at her bed, and at the dresses that rested on it.

Others, hearing her, hurried to see what was wrong.

The crowd moved away from Cicely's bed then to gather round Mabel's, and so prevented Cicely from seeing what was amiss; but she was able to guess from Mabel's words.

"My dresses—ruined! Oh, look! Look!"

Mabel Lynn's voice was tearful, and from the others came angry comment.

"It's been done on purpose!" was Clara's indignant opinion. "It simply must have been! Anyone can see that. But what a terribly mean trick!"

"Horrible! They're spoiled!"

"It can't have been an accident!"

"The girl ought to be expelled!"

The crowd's good temper vanished, changing to anger as the full extent of the damage was seen.

Marcia and Gwen, who had hung back at first, went forward after an exchange of glances. They realised that they had to be very careful indeed if they intended to divert suspicion from themselves.

Suspicion, as yet, had not turned in anyone's direction, for Mabel and the others were far too anxiously examining the dresses, and deciding whether or not the stains could be removed.

"Might have been an accident," said Jemima Carstairs, who always tried to look on the best side of everything. "No one is likely to have been deliberately spiteful, what?"

"Still, even so," objected Mabel, a catch in her voice. "I don't see that any girl has a right to be prying in my things, you know."

"Rather not!"

"H'm," said Barbara thoughtfully. "Looks as though someone has a special down on you, Mabs."

That was what the others thought, and an ominous silence fell. When Barbara said that, she had no special name in mind. But no sooner were the words out of her mouth than a name occurred to her, and it was that which occurred to all—Cicely Jerome!

Involuntarily, Barbara looked towards Cicely, who was sitting up in bed, staring at them all wonderingly, and perplexedly.

"Cicely!" said Marcia, as though seized by inspiration. "My goodness—she's been up here all the time!"

"Alone!" added Gwen Cook.

That was quite enough. No other accusa-

tion was needed. Cicely had sworn enmity for Mabel; Cicely had been alone in the dormitory!

Mabel Lynn, her face dark with anger, approached Cicely's bed, followed by the others. It was anything but a merry, teasing crowd now, however.

"Look here, Cicely," she said, spreading one of the dresses over the bed. "Have you been interfering with my dresses?"

"I, Mabel? No!" Cicely said in surprise. "Why should I?"

"Oh, the innocent!" mocked Marcia, turning to the others. "Did you ever see anything like it? Never heard of dresses, of course."

"Wouldn't know a dress if she saw it," jeered Gwen.

Cicely jumped out of bed and faced them, her eyes ablaze.

"My goodness!" she cried, "are you suggesting that I ruined those dresses, Gwen?"

Gwen Cook backed away, for there was a gleam in Cicely's eyes, and a spot of colour in her cheeks. Mabel Lynn it was, however, who replied:

"You need not go for Gwen," she said curtly, and caught Cicely's shoulder. "You're under suspicion, Cicely, and you'll have to clear yourself. Getting into a temper won't help. This will take some explaining, believe me."

Cicely faced her accusers, amazed and angry, yet a little frightened when she saw that there was not a single friendly face amongst them all. The whole Form was there, making Cicely the centre of a circle. And now Clara brought up another of the dresses.

"Ink!" she said, holding it up. "Let's look at your fingers."

Cicely showed her fingers. Her head was held proudly high, and her jaw had a grim set about it.

"No ink there," she said.

Marcia Loftus looked at Gwen, and Gwen looked at Marcia.

"Washed it off," said Gwen.

"Where's her face towel?" asked Phyllis.

"Beside the bed."

But it was not by the bed.

"No, it's missing."

"Hidden," said Marcia, and stooped to the ground, giving an example that others instantly followed. It was Jemima who, reaching under the bed, brought out a towel and displayed it.

The face towel was ink-stained in one

corner, and that ink-stain was the cynosure of all eyes! Cicely herself stared at it fixedly.

"Why, however did that get there?" she asked in real astonishment; but even to her that question sounded silly.

"How, indeed," chaffed Marcia, although she could have explained that without any difficulty at all. "Walked there, perhaps."

Cicely met Barbara's and Mabel's eyes, and in them, as in the others, read condemnation.

All had jumped to the one explanation. Cicely's face towel was missing, and here was one under the bed. Naturally they did not inquire if it were the one that she had used; or look to see if Marcia's had been used.

"Proof positive," said Mabel Lynn curtly. "You may as well own up to it, Cicely; these ink-stains on your towel speak for themselves."

"I give you my word of honour," she panted, "that I did not touch your dresses, Mabel! I have not had my fingers ink-stained, and—and—and—" She suddenly took the towel from Mabel, staring at it. "And this towel," she cried, "it is not the one I used before I went to bed."

There was an instant chorus of protest and disbelief.

"Nonsense!"

"Make it easier!"

"Of course she would say that."

Mabel Lynn was frowning darkly. She was very angry indeed, and she had just cause for anger. She had been very proud of those dresses, and now they were ruined. What excuse could be found for the spite she imagined to be the cause?

"I'm afraid, Cicely," said Barbara coldly, "that we can't accept that explanation. It's a bit thin."

"Transparent!" added Clara.

Cicely looked appealingly at Barbara, and tears sprang to her eyes. That Barbara should think her guilty of this! Could it be possible? Could Barbara think she was the sort of girl to be so vindictive and spiteful?

"You—you can't think that of me!" she cried. "Oh, please! I wouldn't spoil a girl's dress, however much I hated her—really I wouldn't."

But the girls were shaking their heads, and Mabel stood there implacable.

"Oh, it's no use trying to back out!" she exclaimed. "It's as clear as anything to

me. And I never want to speak to you or have anything at all to do with you again."

"Hear, hear!"

"Nor I."

"Send her to Coventry!"

That was the cry, and they all took it up.

Cicely, white-faced, drew back from them all, and so great was their anger and resentment she wondered fearfully what was to happen next. Never had she seen them so angry. Even good-tempered Barbara was furious. And yet—small wonder, considering the offence!

But they were blaming the wrong girl; could they not see that?

"Oh, let her go her own way," shrugged Clara. "A girl who comes to school nursing some silly grievance is not the sort of girl we want to know, anyway."

"But listen!" Cicely cried. "Oh, please listen! It isn't fair."

"Rubbish!"

"Don't answer her, Mabs!"

Mabel Lynn looked Cicely up and down, then, without a word, turned on her heel and walked away. One by one, the others did the same, deliberately and offensively.

Sent to Coventry! That was her punishment, and she knew now what it meant. She was to be ignored. They were going to go about their business as though she were not there at all, as though she were no more important than a chair; not to be spoken to, never to receive a kind look or a word. She was an outcast!

Miserably, Cicely gave one last appealing look at Barbara, who looked straight past her, one look at Jemima Carstairs, who did not seem to know she was there, and then she pulled over the sheets and stole into bed, dazed by the sudden upheaval, scarcely able to believe that it was not a nightmare.

But no one made mention of the dresses; Mabel was not a sneak, and obviously they intended to deliver judgment and sentence in their own way.

One thing, however, Cicely did make up her mind to—she was not going to take this lying down, she was not going to allow Mabel Lynn to condemn her. She would fight; she would spare no effort to clear her name and wring an apology from Mabel and from them all. Yet, at the back of her mind there was a something that told her that she was in part to blame for their accusation—that she had too freely announced her enmity to Mabel Lynn.

"But she is an enemy—they are all enemies—for grannie's sake I must not be weak—I must hate that girl—I must, I must," she told herself, and clenched her hands and did not give way to her tears until she knew that the rest were fast asleep. Then, indeed, she poured out her heart in the darkness, longing for the comfort of her grandmother's presence, the understanding, and the help of the only true friend she had ever known.

CHAPTER 8.

Keeping Her End Up!

CICELY, when she awoke the next morning, tried to put on a brave face. She knew that it would not do to allow herself to be sat upon, and she tried to conceal how much she was feeling.

Consequently she hummed to herself as she washed, and met everyone's eye and pretended that she was not in Coventry at all. But she did not invite snubs by speaking to girls. Yet how much she wanted to speak! She wanted to say what a lovely morning it was; she wanted to ask questions about the lessons and what they would have to do.

There were so many things she wanted to say, and there was such a babel of talk going on around her, too.

When she had washed, she looked at the towel and studied the ink stains, looking along the line of beds. As she did so she caught Marcia's eyes, and saw that girl suddenly look away.

Marcia, of course! Had she not already suffered at Marcia's hands? And now that she came to recall the events of the previous evening, had not Marcia and Gwen hustled her up to bed? Indeed, they had been responsible for her going to bed early.

Why had that been? Cicely stood quite still, the towel in her hand, and thought things over. Marcia, of course—Cicely's heart thumped with excitement as the suspicion grew—Marcia and Gwen—they were the most likely girls, and certainly their conduct now was most suggestive of guilt. For Marcia kept looking at Gwen and trying to make her understand something or other, while Gwen was looking all too rigidly straight ahead of her. Certainly those two

girls looked anything but of free and open mind.

Cicely smiled a little grimly to herself, and then decided to act.

Picking up the towel and putting it over her arm she walked down the dormitory. Instantly talk ceased, even though they had agreed to ignore her. Marcia, who had been looking at Gwen, now became suddenly rigid, and turned to face Cicely.

"Good-morning," said Cicely.

Marcia ignored her and turned back to her hand basin.

"Here's your towel," Cicely said distinctly. "Can I have mine?"

Marcia half turned, then went back to her basin. But Cicely did not move. She repeated her question, and this time Marcia wheeled upon her and pointed down the dormitory. She did not speak, because girls who spoke to others who were in Coventry were themselves sent to Coventry, but she made a contemptuous gesture as though Cicely were a strange animal she wished to drive away.

"Then I'll take it," said Cicely, and took up the towel which lay on the bar beside the wash-stand, and replaced it with the ink-stained one.

Marcia Loftus gasped and stared, and went rather pale; but she quickly recovered her presence of mind.

"The cheek!" she cried. "That's my towel! My goodness—make her give it back, Barbara."

But Barbara was staring stragely from Marcia to Cicely, and the others were silent, wondering—and perhaps a little suspicious, too. For Marcia Loftus was blustering now, and trying to cover up her momentary loss of control.

"Marcia," exclaimed Clara Trevlyn. "My hat! I—I wonder!"

"My goodness—thinks she can put it on to me!" cried Marcia, her voice gruff and unsteady. "Goodness! She could put the blame on anyone like that. Oh, yes, very clever! Just because you know the girls have a down on me. Is that it? I suppose if it hadn't been me it would have been Gwen. Revenge, eh?"

That was rather a clever move of Marcia's—although none too pleasing to Gwen.

"Yes—either you or Gwen. You were in it together," said Cicely coldly. "I wondered why you were so anxious that I should come up to the dormitory. Now I know."

Marcia turned to the others.
 "I was down in the corridor, as you know. My goodness! You are not going to believe her?"

Barbara Redfern shrugged her shoulders.
 "No one has suggested that. You seem to be getting excited about nothing, Marcia. We know you were in the corridor, and we haven't accused you yet."

"Who herself excuses herself accuses," murmured Jennima Carstairs sleepily, stifling a yawn. "Seems clever of the French to say that, what?"

"Oh, well, I know you're all only too ready to think me guilty," retorted Marcia. "So I shan't be surprised if you do now."

She was painfully conscious of the bad impression she had made; just as Cicely was well aware that she had scored heavily. And she scored more by taking things coolly now and not pressing the point.

If she had argued, if she had tried to prove that it was Marcia, she might well have lost all sympathy. But she maintained a dignified attitude in the matter. She dressed without trying to speak to anyone else, and was the first out of the dormitory, knowing that they were all longing to discuss her, and anxious, on her own part, to give them all a chance.

She went downstairs with mingled feelings. For although she was still under punishment there was every chance that her name would be cleared; and if that happened—well, she would be in a good position.

The hall was deserted save for a servant who was arranging letters in the rack. Letter-time was always exciting, and soon there would be a rush of girls to see the post. First day of term did not as a rule produce many letters, but the girls always lived in hope. Some kind uncle or aunt might have been so grieved at parting as to hurry off at once and send a five-pound note as a consolation gift; but more likely might not!

Cicely went to the board and looked at it with interest.

"Jerome—J," she said. "Anything for me, I wonder?"

"Yes, miss. Cicely Jerome—Fourth Form?"

"Oh, yes, yes!" cried Cicely eagerly, and she took the letter. "From grannie—I mean, my grandmother! Oh, how splendid!"

She took the letter away with her across

the hall, and then instantly changed her mind when she looked out of the window, and went out into the sunny quadrangle.

Instantly home came before her eyes, that lovely place with its extensive grounds, and her dear pets—and—and then she suddenly remembered that there was no such place now—thanks to Mr. Lynn.

Instead of seeing the familiar notepaper, there was the address of an hotel.

"My dearest," the letter began, and there was a page or two of grannie's close, neat handwriting, which was rather easy to read, and seemed to be so characteristic of her that it brought her before Cicely as though she were real. It was easy to imagine grannie speaking all that she had written.

Poor grannie, what a day she had had! Solicitors, house-agents, flat hunting, and then this letter in time to catch the last post.

"I suppose there will be a letter for me in the morning, darling. I'm sure you will be happy. Of course you will. I'm sure you will work, too. Perhaps I may be able to keep on paying your fees for some time. But that Mr. Lynn! Oh, how I hate the sound of his name, dearest! All our unhappiness—all our misfortune—all due to him. Ah, well, we must face things bravely, my darling. Learn all you can, make friends, and write to me often and often, and never cease to love me, will you? I am so lonely now—"

Tears came to Cicely's eyes as she read that. Just as if she ever would cease to love darling grannie—or cease thinking of her! Yet she must pretend to her. It would never do to tell the whole truth: that she was miserable at school, that she had made no friends. Nor did she want to say that Mabel, Mr. Lynn's daughter, was here. No, she would have to pretend that she was happy. Say that she was having a merry time, when in truth she was just as miserable as a girl could be.

And all through the Lynns. Even now Mabel was spending money which had been theirs. Those dresses that were ruined had been bought with that money, and might have been Cicely's own. Nor had the money been obtained honestly. According to all that grannie had told her, it was literally a swindle.

"I hate her—I hate all the Lynns! Poor, poor grannie!" And yet—was it not rather

awful to hate anyone? Could she hate Mabel Lynn really and truly?

As she asked herself that question she saw Mabel Lynn coming across the quadrangle. She had a tennis racket under her arm, and Barbara, Jemima, Clara, and Marjorie were just behind.

"Tennis—everyone for tennis," urged Clara. "Come on, Mabs, we'll take them on!"

"You mean, Mabs and I will," corrected Barbara.

Barbara's arm slipped through Mabel's, and Cicely sighed. Barbara might have been her friend as well as Mabel's. Perhaps she could have been Barbara's friend still if she had not set herself to be Mabel's enemy.

Behind them came a crowd of others, anxious to see the game; and how merry and high-spirited they were. It was hard to believe that this really was a school. It seemed altogether too jolly.

Cicely stood in the quadrangle alone and watched them go down to tennis, and her heart was heavy indeed. It was her own choice that she was not with them. If she had not made herself Mabel's enemy she might even now be a friend. And yet would she not be a traitor? What would grannie say if she knew that she had made friends with Mabel Lynn? It was a family feud, and she must keep it up.

Sooner or later, Cicely thought, Barbara would find her friend out—and then—well, then Cicely would feel justified. At present she lived in her heart that she did not. Deep down she felt that she should give Mabel Lynn a chance; that before condemning that girl she should watch to see whether the wrongs of the father had been vested in her or not.

But the letter from her grandmother was in her hand, and she stiffened herself. At the Lynn's door lay the cause of their ruin; to the Lynn's door she should bring retribution! Whatever she might suffer in the enactment, that, she told herself, was her duty.

CHAPTER 9.

Mabel's Strange Letter!

"COME on, Mabs! You can read that letter later."

Clara Trevlyn, in her boisterous way, caught Mabel Lynn by the shoulder, and hauled her through the gate

into the tennis court. A letter had arrived for Mabel by the post, and she was now busy reading it, at a moment when Clara deemed that their game ought to be commencing.

But Mabel Lynn, although she suffered herself to be led on to the court, did not immediately take off her blazer and start playing. She went on with her letter, a most serious expression on her face.

"Well, let's do something, for goodness' sake," said Clara. "Come on, Mabs! Toss for ends, if you're taking Jimmy and me on. Mabs won't have finished that long letter before brekker."

But Mabel, although she had not read the whole letter, had finished it for the time being, and now lowered it, to look in some perplexity at Barbara, who was watching her with an amused smile.

"Anything wrong, Mabs?" Barbara asked.

"Nothing exactly wrong, but queer," Mabel answered her, slowly and thoughtfully. "I can't quite make it out."

"Jimmy's our puzzle expert," said Clara. "Forward, Jimmy, and eluci—something or other the mystery."

"Anything that will let me off tennis for a bit," nodded Jemima, adjusting her monocle. "Spot of bother with father's handwriting, Mabs? Aged uncle suffering from writer's cramp, or what?"

But Mabel Lynn shook her head and looked more worried than ever.

"Oh, no, it's nothing to do with that," she said. "Something—well, never mind! Let's get on with tennis."

They all saw that it was by dint of great effort that Mabel managed to drag her mind off that puzzling subject, whatever it was, and start the game. So the game began, and soon the ball was being pounded unmercifully.

Quite a number of other girls had come down to the tennis courts. They had come to play if there were room, and if not, to watch, and their comments flowed very freely indeed, as was the custom at Cliff House.

Still, it was good fun, and that was what mattered. They were only playing to get a little exercise before breakfast, and certainly they had that—if it was only looking for the balls that Clara kept sending out of court into the shrubbery.

By the time the bell rang for breakfast they had all of them had enough, and they were panting and gasping as they entered the schoolhouse. But Mabel Lynn hung back rather, looking thoughtful, so that Barbara, slipping her arm through hers, tried to find out what was amiss.

"Not trouble at home, Mabs?" she asked.

"Eh? Oh, no, Babs! It's all right. Only—rather queer, really. Considering what's happened, I mean."

Then Mabel, who clearly did not wish to explain what was worrying her, pointed across the hall to where fat Bessie Bunter was standing arguing with Stella Stone.

"Oh, goodness, dear old Bessie! She's arguing about a remittance," Mabel exclaimed.

That is precisely what the fat girl was doing, and arguing quite vehemently, too, declaring that there really was some gross carelessness in the management of the post at Cliff House.

"My remittance ought to have arrived," she said. "I do think it's a shame, Stella, the way things go astray."

Stella, who was the best-tempered mistress in the school, only laughed.

"My dear old Bessie," she said, "you've been expecting that remittance for ages. Perhaps it's carelessness at the other end, you know. Perhaps the duke hasn't sent it."

Bessie blinked indignantly through her thick glasses.

"Oh, really! They're sure to have sent it, because I s-sent round an urgent appeal, you know, to all my relations, s-saying I was hard up. So they simply must have sent it."

"Of course," said Barbara teasingly as she arrived with Mabel.

"No chance of a mistake at all," agreed Mabel. "I should write to the Postmaster-General about it, Bessie. It's disgraceful all your fivers being delayed like this."

Stella Stone, seeing that Bessie's attention was now diverted, tiptoed away.

"It's a jolly shame," said Bessie. "A new girl like Cicely gets a letter, and I don't. And I'm an old girl."

"Funny old girl, too," agreed Clara. "Poor old Bessie!"

"And it isn't as though new girls need

money, either," went on Bessie. "Cicely doesn't need as much to eat as I do. You know we never get nearly enough here, any of us. So perhaps you'd like to lend me five shillings until my remittance comes, Babs, dear."

"Sorry, dear, nothing doing."

"Oh, really! I s-say, Mabs, how about you?"

"Oh, I'm fine," teased Mabel. "Ask Clara. Here, Clara, don't hurry off when Bessie's trying to borrow five shillings. Let's all stand together, for goodness sake!"

Bessie Bunter grunted then, and knew that she was unlucky. If she had been as good at paying back loans as she was at raising them, then perhaps girls would have been more willing to lend; but the truth was that Bessie's memory was appallingly bad when it came to repayment of loans. So now she was left sadly alone to go in to breakfast while Barbara, Mabel, Jemima and the others went to wash.

In their study, Barbara and Mabel tossed down racquets and slipped off blazers. Then Barbara looked round the room and raised her eyebrows in surprise.

"Cicely hasn't bedded herself in, apparently. Bit of luck, eh? She's supposed to share with us."

"Ye-es," said Mabel. "Looks as though she hasn't. That'll mean that she has gone in with Marcia."

"She won't like that. But—well, it's her own fault," Barbara said. "Goodness, knows what she has against you, Mabel!"

"No," said Mabel, in a queer way.

"You don't know, do you?" asked Barbara in surprise, noticing that Mabel had gone rather pink.

"I don't know, Babs. I—of course it's her imagination—only—" Barbara puckered her forehead in a frown, while her friend hesitated and faltered. "But I've had a letter from home, and what do you think—between ourselves, Babs?"

"Goodness knows!" Barbara shrugged. "Anything serious? Why, not about Cicely, surely?" she added.

Before Mabel could answer Clara came hurrying along excitedly, hanging upon the door so that it went with a thud against the bookcase.

"My hat! Still gassing?" she asked genially. "You'd talk a donkey's hind leg off, Mabs. Brekker's waiting, and Janey's

getting in a most awful stew. Come on, do! And where is that wretched kid Cicely?"

"Cicely? Goodness knows!" shrugged Mabel. "In her new study, perhaps."

"Bother! I've been asked to fetch her," grunted Clara.

"I'll go," offered Barbara. "Part of a Form captain's duty, you know."

So Barbara went along to Marcia and Gwen's study, and opened the door. Then she drew up short on the threshold in surprise.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "I say—what-cver's happened?"

Mabel and Clara hurried to her side and stared into the room, to find Cicely Jerome sitting at the table, her head in her arms, sobbing as though her heart would break.

"Cicely!" exclaimed Mabel. "Oh, goodness! Poor kid! I say, Cicely—" And she dropped her hand on the girl's shoulder.

All three overlooked the fact that she was in Coventry, and they stepped towards her. Instantly, hearing their footsteps, Cicely sprang to her feet, dabbing at her tear-stained cheeks.

And then at once they saw what was the matter. It was not the fact that she was in Coventry, but a torn-up photograph on the table told its own story.

"A photograph of a pony," said Clara.

Cicely choked back her sobs. "It's the only photo I have of my pony, and—and he's dead now, and they tore it up! How could they be so cruel!" she cried passionately.

"But who tore it up?" asked Barbara in astonishment. "Surely no girl could be so unkind as that!"

Cicely wiped her tears.

"It has been torn up, but I don't know by whom. Perhaps it was revenge!" She looked at Mabel, and that girl went red.

"If you mean that I did it, Cicely," she said, "you're on the wrong track. I'm frightfully sorry it has happened, but I'm the last girl who wants to hurt your feelings, really."

"You've no right to suggest it was Mabel without proof," said Barbara. "It's more likely to be Gwen and Marcia—one or the other, you know. Only someone as mean and spiteful as they would have done it. Mabel is neither."

Cicely bit her lip and turned away, and

Barbara, Mabel, and Clara, after a moment's hesitation, went out of the room.

"Can't do anything with her," said Clara. "Of course it is pretty awful to have a photograph like that torn up. Doesn't give her a good impression of Cliff House, does it? Pretty awful for the kid!"

They all agreed on that, and they were all certain that the culprit was Marcia, or else Gwen; but it was impossible to prove that, and they had no time to discuss it further, owing to breakfast.

As it was, the three of them received lines for being late, and there was a faint rattle of knives and forks when they reached the table. Even lines had not been able to break that bad habit of the Fourth's. There always was a rattle of cutlery when a latecomer at last arrived.

"Yours was getting cold," said Bessie in a whisper to Barbara, "so I ate some of it for you."

"My goodness—thanks!" said Barbara, and laughed.

"And I had just a bit of yours, too," Bessie added to Mabel. "You don't mind?"

"Not much use if I do," was Mabel's smiling reply.

"Where is Cicely?" asked Miss Matthews.

"Cicely—who is Cicely?" frowned Phyllis Howell, and there was a chuckle.

"Is there a girl name of Cicely?" asked Freda Foote innocently.

"Fifty lines, Freda," asked Miss Matthews sternly. "Clara, I asked you to find the girl. Why did you not do so?"

Clara's reply to that coincided with Cicely's arrival, and, of course, everyone noticed the tell-tale traces of tears. Miss Matthews gave her a searching look, and then glanced quickly up and down the ranks at table, noticing that everyone was going to great lengths in order not to notice Cicely, even though Cicely endeavoured not to look at anyone.

Phyllis Howell, next to whom Cicely's place was set, looked right past her. Philippa Derwent made a remark about feeling a draught, and said that something seemed to have brushed by her.

Most of the girls, noticing her tears, jumped to the conclusion that it was her shame that was the cause of it, the reaction of their punishment, for they did not know as yet of that torn-up photograph.

Cicely sat at her place, and was served with her breakfast. All around her the girls were carrying on conversations, and there were soft laughs and occasional giggles. But they were not discussing her. Indeed, they simply did not know she was there. No one passed her the mustard, pepper, or salt, and she did not want to attract Miss Matthews' attention by asking for them.

This was the beginning—her first real day at school. How long was it to go on like this? Was it to stay in this place that she had to work hard to earn a scholarship?

And yet she knew that if only she were in a different position she could have been as happy as any one of them. Light hearts were all about her. Everyone was happy.

Then she stole a look at Mabel Lynn, and was amazed to find that girl looking at her, and in such a queer way, too. Only for a second their eyes met. There had been pity in Mabel's, and Cicely had a queer misgiving. Was she in the wrong? Should she be friends with Mabel, and end all this unhappiness?

When breakfast finished there was an orderly retreat, but Cicely loitered so that she was last out of the room, staying to pick something from the floor, for she did not want to suffer more humiliation than was necessary.

Out of the room they all filed, and Barbara and Mabel, the moment they were outside, were arm-in-arm, as Cicely saw. She stepped aside as she saw Barbara glance back, and stood inside the door. Thus it was that she overheard what they said.

Said Barbara:

"Oh, what was it you were going to say about your father when Clara came along—and about Cicely?"

Mabel, too, looked round; but they were alone, and Cicely, not wishing to overhear confidences, tried to cough; but a cough would not come. Her throat ached from her crying, and she found that there was only a lump to swallow.

"Well, it's between ourselves, Babs. It's so queer. He seems to know Cicely, and he says that I'm to make up to her. I'm to be friends with her—go out of my way, if necessary."

"To make up to her for what?" asked Barbara.

CHAPTER 10.

The Fourth Against Her.

AS soon as Barbara and Mabel had gone from the corridor Cicely made up her mind to seek out Marcia Loftus. She felt a good deal more sure of herself now that she had heard Mabel's remark to Barbara. Further, she was practically certain that Marcia was the girl responsible for the damage to Mabel's dresses, and also to her photograph, but that had yet to be proved. But what gave her confidence was the knowledge that Mabel Lynn was feeling guilty, and that Mt. Lynn was apparently, from the tone of Mabel's conversation, suffering the pangs of remorse.

Marcia Loftus did not prove at all easy to find. There were times when Marcia was too much to the fore, as Cicely had found; but Marcia could make herself exceedingly scarce, too, and she did so now.

Cicely Jerome did not mean to be sat upon, and she intended to show the Fourth that no amount of injustice could break her spirit. She would do what she thought was right, even though it went against popular feeling, and she had no intention of altering her decision just because they were going to treat her harshly on account of it.

As usual on the first real work morning of the term there was much sighing and groaning, and a great deal of tossing about of books. Most of the girls were in their studies, despite the bright sunshine, busy arranging those text-books which would be needed for lessons.

Marcia Loftus, however, was not in the study; she was not in the Common-room, nor to be seen anywhere in the quadrangle, so that it was only too evident that she was lying low.

There remained the dormitory, and Cicely mounted the stairs in the hope of finding Marcia there. But she was ignorant of the rules, and in particular of the rule which forbade girls to return to the dormitory after rising.

Jemima Carstairs was in the dormitory corridor and she looked up as she heard Cicely's footsteps. Cicely, of course, looked straight at her, for Jemima had seemed inclined to be friendly at first.

"Good-morning," said Cicely, wondering if she would be snubbed or if Jemima

would prove to be weak and dare to speak to her behind the others' backs.

Jemima, she found, was not that sort of despicable girl. She did smile faintly, because she had no disposition which enabled her to dislike any girl strongly, and especially not to order; but she did not break faith with the Form's decision by speaking to a girl who was in Coventry.

Instead, Jemima pointed to the dormitory, looked at Cicely, and shook her head in a horrified way, making it clear to Cicely that the dormitory was out of bounds.

Cicely looked at her, smiled broadly, and raised her shoulders in a shrug of bewilderment. But she did not speak, either. She pointed to the dormitory, to herself, and then made the motion of running after someone, and next drew a rough caricature of Marcia on the wall with her finger.

Jemima stared open-eyed at first, and then laughed. Her look seemed to say: "Well, you're a queer one! This is a funny way of taking Coventry."

But Jemima joined in the spirit of the thing. She drew a caricature, too, this time of Bessie Bunter's face—a face particularly easy to draw since it consisted mostly of circles. One large one for the face, two smaller ones for the glasses, and then an immense one for Bessie's fat person. After it she drew a question mark.

Of course, the marks did not show on the wall; but it was easy to see what was drawn; and Cicely laughed and shook her head.

The absurdity of it struck them both, and they laughed. Dumb show was permissible, of course, but this seemed to be quite a revue in its way.

At last Jemima pointed to the dormitory, pointed to Cicely, shook her head and then, making heavy sighs, commenced to write imaginary lines at a tremendous rate. Cicely understood that.

She nodded her head in thanks, and turned back down the stairs, Jemima following. Barbara Redfern, captain of the Fourth Form, was approaching with Bessie Bunter, and Cicely smiled at her, too, and made signs of the deaf and dumb alphabet—or what might be taken for them.

Barbara just stared, and Bessie Bunter

came to a standstill and blinked in astonishment.

"G-good gracious! What's wrong with her?" she asked.

"Offering to give you advance on your remittance—in deaf and dumb," said Barbara with a smile. "Come on—she's in Coventry."

"Oh, really! But is that really what she's saying?" asked Bessie. "What's the deaf and dumb for five shillings, Babs?"

"You can't borrow five shillings from a girl in Coventry," said Barbara severely. "Don't be ridiculous."

"Serve her right if I did," said Bessie vindictively, and held up her hand with the fingers and thumb spread out.

Cicely was enjoying herself immensely. It seemed that she had succeeded in making the punishment look ridiculous already. Bessie Bunter would surely have spoken if Barbara had not been there. Barbara, realising that this was not dignified, caught her fat friend by the shoulder, but Bessie's podgy hands still showed the sign of five.

Cicely looked thoughtful and held up both hands. Ten!

Ten shillings? That was more than flesh and blood could bear—more than Bessie's could, anyway.

"Let me go, Babs," she protested. "I s-say. She's going to lend me ten shillings. I said all along she was a good sort and ought not to be sent to Coventry. Let's make it up—"

"No, you don't," interrupted Barbara sternly. "You awful little cadger!"

Bessie Bunter, protesting, was dragged away, and Cicely continued her way downstairs. She did not meet with the same fortune with the others, for these were girls she did not really know.

There was Peggy Preston. Cicely knew her name and knew her by sight. Peggy was a "swot"—but a nice girl, and with her was Vivienne Leigh, her closest friend. Then others walked by up the stairs. All of them ignored Cicely, and her momentary sunshine vanished.

But her jaw had a grim, set look. She was innocent of their charge, and she did not mean them to make her "crawl." What a shock for them all when she proved that they had been unjust.

She went into her study again and sorted

out her books. There was a lessons timetable placed there for her by Barbara Redfern.

Her books were all of them new, and she arranged them on a spare shelf round Marcia Loftus' and then looked round the room. There were blank spaces on the wall where she could put her own precious photographs, but much of the room had been taken already by Marcia and Gwen Cook. There were photographs of their people, and all manner of little ornaments. The mantelshelf was simply crowded with them.

On the whole it was not a nice study, telling too much about Marcia and Gwen, their slovenliness, their meanness, and their unpopularity. Rackets, hockey-sticks and other sporting equipment were sadly lacking, and in their place were cheap novels, fashion papers, and old chocolate boxes stuffed with rubbish.

It was different altogether from the study Cicely might have shared with Barbara—but with Barbara and Mabel. There was the rub.

Quite suddenly the bell for the first lesson rang, interrupting Cicely in the middle of a daydream about home. Because she was a new girl she obeyed the bell's summons instantly and snatched up her books and ran to the doorway.

Miss Bullivant proved to be a tartar that morning, and Cicely was glad that she was good at figures. She knew that some girls who are clever at other things are often duffers where figures are concerned; but if Miss Bullivant also knew that she did not take it into consideration. Her idea was that a girl who was not good at figures could be made excellent by having a sufficient number of lines to write out, and by being ridiculed by the Form.

Bessie Bunter, Clara Trevlyn, Agnes White—all of them came in for their share of condemnation; while Maud Devine, who was "a dud" at algebra, but good at history, was in tears when the lesson finished.

"Now she's happy," whispered Clara. "She's drawn tears. That takes the pressure off."

And, sure enough, Cicely found that after that Miss Bullivant calmed down. It really did seem that she worked herself up into a pitch of fury that reached its

climax when someone cried. After the lesson, indeed, Clara suggested that Maud should cry at a certain stated interval, just before Clara was due to receive lines. Clara even promised to nudge Maud on the shoulder at the proper time.

But Maud did not agree to that, although she smiled through her tears.

"Blessed if the B-Bull would ever make me cry," said Bessie Bunter. "I know she's wrong half the time. It's cheek, the way she pretends that two x doesn't equal nought, because I know; my father proved it to me. He can prove a lot of things like that. He proved a lot of shares, or something, were worth hundreds of pounds to a man who bought them and found they weren't worth anything."

"Good old Bunters!" said Jemima.

Cicely stole a look at Mabel. Mabel returned the look and blushed. Strange that mention of such a fictitious swindle as that should make Mabel look at Cicely, and strange that Mabel should blush at meeting Cicely's eye. If that were not guilt—well, what was it? Cicely wondered.

Bessie rambled on, with the Form laughing at her, and when they went out into the quadrangle she was still trying to explain how scrupulously honest the Bunters really were, and would someone lend her five shillings. But no one would, although Jemima did offer to prove to Bessie that if x equalled half-a-crown, then two x equalled five shillings, and therefore, according to Bessie's reckoning, nothing. Jemima even gave Bessie nothing, and said she would have the two half-crowns back on Saturday.

Cicely, although not included in the conversation, was in the group that gathered round Bessie and Jemima to hear this "business" transaction. Then the crowd drifted away from her, and she saw Barbara gathering her friends together.

"What's this—the concert?" asked Clara.

"No, something else," said Barbara, looking in Cicely's direction.

With an air of tremendous importance, half a dozen girls went to Barbara's study, and Cicely felt a pin-pricking of excitement, and an eagerness to know what it was all about.

That meeting was indeed about her, and

Barbara was serious. Mabel Lynn was there, looking somewhat self-conscious, and so were Marjorie Hazeldene, Clara Trevlyn, and Jemima Carstairs, Phyllis Howell, Bessie Bunter, and Philippa Derwent.

"Now," said Barbara, "about this kid Cicely. I don't know what you think, but my impression is that she rings true."

"Hear, hear!" chimed in Mabel.

"I saw Connie speaking to Marcia and Gwen a minute ago," said Phyllis Howell. "I'm sure she was asking why Cicely's in Coventry."

Barbara nodded her head.

"That's just it. Connie is sure to butt in, and she'll make the most—or, rather, the worst—of everything. Miss Prinrose will take a very serious view of this, and I think we ought to go into it a bit more deeply."

"Hear, hear!" concurred Jemima. "Speaking personally, y'know, I rather like our little Cicely. A nice kid, but a bit too against Mabel for my liking."

"Jealousy," was Phyllis' opinion. "Might be because Mabel's coming put her nose out of joint. She thought she was getting on awfully well with Babs."

"Something in that," nodded Clara. "But I think it was something to do with—well, things before she came."

And Clara stole a sideglance at Mabel Lynn, who looked more confused than ever.

Then Mabel straightened herself.

"Fact is," she said, "she has a grudge against my father, I think. Of course, it's a misunderstanding; she's got things all wrong. But—but I can see her point of view, and I'm sorry for her. If I could be friends, I would. I'm going to try, anyway."

"What! Even though she's in Coventry?" asked Clara.

"Even after she spoiled your dresses?" added Phyllis in dismay, as well as surprise. "That was a horrid thing. There's no excuse for that, however much of a grudge she had against your father."

Mabel admitted all that.

"But, you see, I don't think she did it. I'm getting more and more sure that she didn't. After all, she doesn't act at all like a girl who has a guilty conscience, does she? And then there's that photograph business." She told them about the

photograph that had been torn up, but did not mention that Cicely had practically accused her. "Who'd do that sort of thing but Marcia, eh?"

"Well, it is certainly more like Marcia," admitted Phyllis slowly. "I don't want to blame the kid if she isn't really at fault, naturally. And there is no doubt Marcia is capable of anything."

"And knows Cicely has a down on Mabs," pointed out Clara.

"Marcia it is," agreed Jemima. "I'm voting for Marcia. Whenever there's villainy afoot Marcia's my first choice. My safety first, as it were."

Barbara looked round the table at them all and raised her eyebrows.

"Then what's to be done? We can't take the sentence off without some other kind of proof, surely!"

"My hat, no!" said Clara aghast. "That would make us look the most price-less asses! Must have proof first."

"Then," said Barbara, "we'll have to look for it. In the name of fairness, you know, we must do that!"

"And I hope we find it," said Mabel quite piously.

"S-so do I," said Bessie thoughtfully. "She might change her mind or spend that ten shillings, mightn't she?"

The meeting was about to break up then when the door was pushed open, and Peggy Preston looked into the study.

"Heard the news," she asked, "about Connie?"

"No. Don't say she's gone off pop?" said Clara hopefully.

"No. She's on the warpath," said Peggy warningly. "She's looking into the business of Mabs' dresses, and they say she's going to make things very hot for Cicely. She can make things look pretty black."

The girls in the study exchanged looks. They had not arrived at their decision too soon, apparently. Connie Jackson, when she wanted vengeance, did not waste time.

"Well, she can't make things look blacker than the dresses after the ink went on them," said Mabel ruefully. "But I think we'll make Connie feel pretty small."

"What-ho! And perhaps our beloved Marcia won't be any too happy," sighed Jemima.

Then, because there was quite a commotion in the corridor, they went out of the study.

That commotion was not really surprising, for Connie Jackson was setting about matters in a businesslike manner. *Jemima* said that even a mare's nest might as well be hunted for methodically, at which *Cicely*, coming from her study, smiled at *Jemima* with pleasure.

For that remark gave away the secret of the meeting. They must surely have decided in her favour. And that meant not only that her sentence would be remitted, but also that she would be in a very strong position indeed. She had won the Form's esteem, and that was no mean achievement in the Fourth Form at *Cliff House*.

But she had won something else, too—the suspicion of *Connie Jackson*, and that monitress was now doing her very best to fathom the truth of the affair of the spoiled dresses—the truth, because she thought that the truth was that *Cicely* had behaved disgracefully.

"Barbara! Where is Barbara?" *Cicely* heard her say. And, of course, *Barbara* had to go to *Connie* obediently, instantly.

"Here I am, *Connie*! Anything wrong?"

Connie was very businesslike indeed.

"Yes. I am investigating this disgraceful business of *Mabel Lynn's frocks*."

Then *Mabel* interrupted:

"Oh, *Connie*, but I don't wish to make a complaint, you know."

"Never mind whether you do or do not. This affair will have to be gone into thoroughly. We cannot have *Cliff House* girls acting in this way. It is absolutely unthinkable. This girl hates you. Is that so?"

Mabel Lynn looked considerably confused.

"I don't think she knows me very well. She can hardly hate me after knowing me only a day."

Connie snapped her fingers impatiently. She realised that *Mabel* was "backing down" from making a charge, and realised, too, that she would have the sympathy of the Form in that, for it was generally felt in the Form that they could punish their own wrongdoers without appealing to monitresses or mistresses.

"Now look here, I shall be very cross in a minute!" *Connie* said sternly, and gave *Mabel* a severe look. "I don't want

any deceit. Has this girl openly expressed enmity for you?"

Mabel shrugged her shoulders.

"In a way, I suppose, she has."

"You suppose?" *Connie* gave *Mabel* a hard look, and then turned to *Marcia Loftus*, who was well to the fore. "*Marcia*," she said, "did I understand you to say that it was well known in the Form that this girl *Cicely* was a sworn enemy of *Mabel's*?"

"Yes, *Connie*; everyone knows it," *Marcia* said meekly.

Then she looked about her as though she were trying to convince the others that she could not help letting that out. But there was no one present who showed any signs of belief.

"And that is true?" asked *Connie* of *Barbara*.

"Yes, it's true," admitted *Barbara*, since there was nothing else to be done. "But that isn't really evidence, is it?"

"That's my affair, *Barbara*. This girl, then, came to the school, and the first thing she did was to pick a quarrel with someone—is that it?"

Connie, as usual, was putting the very worst possible complexion on the affair, and the girls looked resentful. They did not know what lay behind *Cicely's* objection to *Mabel*, but it could hardly be said with any degree of truth that she had picked a quarrel with *Mabel*.

"Well, now, to be quite fair," said *Mabel*, "she did not want to make friends with me. I think it's a sort of family affair, that's all."

"Send the girl to me," said *Connie* loftily.

Cicely was sent for. She came, and she saw that the sympathies of the crowd were not actively against her. They were curious, and they obviously felt now that they were going to hear the truth of the matter.

Cicely felt that she had nothing of which she need be ashamed, and her chin was up as she faced *Connie*. Why she disliked the *Lynns* was surely no affair of the monitress', but she meant to tell the truth.

"Now then, you," said *Connie* harshly, "what's all this vendetta business? Why have you made a dead set against *Mabel*?"

Cicely gave a swift glance at *Mabel Lynn*, and saw what she thought was a

look of appeal. Mabel was embarrassed, and decidedly ill at ease.

Was she afraid of what Cicely was going to say? Was it her guilty conscience that gave her that look?

"Come on, out with it!" threatened Connie. "Is it jealousy? Is it because she has more money than you, eh? Because she had pretty dresses, and you thought you ought to have them, so you spoiled hers?"

Cicely drew herself up.

"Certainly not. I am not jealous of Mabel. But I simply don't want to know anyone of her family. That's all."

"Because," said Connie, slowly but clearly, "you think that her money ought to be yours, because you think the Lynns robbed your people of their money?"

Cicely started back, amazed by the question, quite unprepared that Connie should know so much. And then she saw Mabel's face, white and strained, her eyes angry, and saw, too, that it was Mabel who was now the cynosure of all eyes, that girls were nudging each other and whispering.

"Is that it?" Connie insisted.

CHAPTER 11.

Making Plans for Mabel.

"IS that it?"

Connie Jackson's voice had a ring of triumph in it, and the girls who stood by waiting to hear Cicely's response drew nearer now in the hope of some real excitement.

Hitherto, they had not known the real cause of the enmity, but if this were it—well, they were interested! From Cicely to Mabel, from Mabel to Cicely their looks went, and dwelled more upon the accused than upon the accuser.

Cicely had to reply, but the words did not come instantly to her lips. A simple "yes" would have been the truth, and Connie would have been satisfied, but Cicely saw the look on Mabel's face, and felt a sudden new pity for the girl.

"I don't think that is either here or there," Cicely said quietly. "I have said all that seems necessary. I dislike the Lynns."

Connie Jackson smiled maliciously.

"Well, that's as good as a confession,"

she said. "But you haven't even the courage to make an open accusation in front of Mabel."

Cicely flared at that.

"I have the courage," she retorted, "but it is a family affair, and I don't see that it concerns anyone else."

At that there was more murmuring amongst the crowd, and Connie Jackson became grim.

"You don't seem to appreciate that you are a Cliff House girl now," she said. "I am not your governess, but you will find that you can't have your own way here. We don't spoil and pet new girls, you know. You'll have to go to Miss Primrose."

"Now?"

"Yes, now," said Connie sharply. "Go along. Tell Miss Primrose that I have sent you. I will follow and make my report."

Cicely turned on her heel and, after a look at Mabel, went down the corridor to the staircase that led to the hall. Behind her the crowd's whispering grew, and Connie Jackson, immensely enjoying the situation, made the very best of it.

"Now, I don't want any gossiping," she said sternly. "It may or may not be true what this girl says, so don't start persecuting Mabel."

At once there was a protest.

"Persecuting Mabel? My giddy aunt!" gasped Clara. "Just as if we would—on that evidence."

"Just as if we would, even if it were true!" added Marjorie indignantly.

It was indeed absurd to suppose that the Fourth Form would turn suddenly against one of its favourites. But Connie Jackson herself would have turned against anyone on the slightest evidence, and so she judged that others would act in a similar way.

But whether the Form meant to visit any judgment on Mabel or not, the fact remained that that announcement had caused something of an unpleasant situation.

"Don't take any notice, Mabs," said Barbara, and linked arms with her friend.

"Forget it," advised Clara. "The kid's off her head, you know. Probably her family has lost money, and she's just mad about it."

"And, anyway, we know your father, dear," Marjorie added softly. "We know that the whole thing is merely absurd."

But in spite of her friend's comforting words, Mabel looked none too happy. Where mud is flung some is sure to stick, and she knew that the subject would soon be gossiped throughout the school, and that girls would be looking queerly in her direction and nodding mysteriously.

"And daddy asked me to make a friend of her," she mused, wrath in her tone. "This is a fine way of repaying him, isn't it?"

"Beastly!" said Clara, in wrath. "But never mind that, Mabs. Come and chat about this concert. You're going to be a rip-roaring success."

"Yes; come on, dear," said Barbara, adding her persuasion to Clara's. "There's heaps and heaps to talk over, and we want to wake up the whole village."

They all saw that Mabel really had been hard hit by that accusation, even though it had not been backed by the slightest hint of proof. And they intended, if possible, to turn their friend's thoughts into happier channels.

The idea of the concert had been Barbara's. Barbara Redfern, as befitted a Form captain, was full of bright ideas, and it had occurred to her that there was no better way of welcoming Mabel back to the school than of "starring" her in a concert. After all, it was not every school which could boast among its members a girl who had appeared on the stage—a real stage—so naturally enough the Fourth wanted to make the most of it.

As for Mabel, she had been only too keen. She had not wanted to drop her acting completely, and it was such a change from one to the other that a little interlacing would be welcome.

But Mabel now was not in one of her liveliest moods. She went with her friends back to the study, but she did not take much part in the arrangements and wrangles that went on, and her friends sighed, and exchanged worried looks.

"Now, you suggest things, dear," urged Barbara, sharpening a pencil. "We want the thing to go with a zip!"

"And a whoop!" added Clara, perching herself on the table. "Of course, Mabs will be a brilliant attraction as Lady Macbeth. But I'm not sure the villagers are too keen on that sort of thing. Couldn't we write something that would show up her ability better?"

Clara asked that in all seriousness, and Jemima Carstairs looked at her through her monocle and smiled gently.

"A slight improvement on old Bill the Bard?" she asked.

"Why not?" asked Clara. "I'm sick of these 'Forsooths!' and 'Go to, thou scurvy knaves!'; anyway, they've cured scurvy now with a fruit diet, or something. Let's write a really ripping play, shall we?"

Clara's eyes danced with excitement, and the excitement met with sympathy from the others. It was not a bad idea, really.

"If we could write a play," said Marjorie Hazeldene, a little doubtfully. "But why not do that thing of Captain Carstairs' we did once before?"

"Well, we did it before," said Barbara, "and all the parts are booked. We want something good for Mabel, don't we?"

"I s-say, you girls," suggested Bessie Bunter. "How about me? You know what clever little stories I can write. Well, suppose I write a play?"

There was laughter at once.

"Oh, cheese it!" said Clara slangily. "My dear old Bessie, this isn't a time for joking. This is jolly serious!"

"Well, I can write a s-serious play, you know," said the fat girl, with enthusiasm. "A banqueting scene with a real banquet—Mabel is poisoned."

"Here, I say!" protested Mabel. "Not with real poison!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, p-perhaps not real poison," admitted Bessie. "But you've read about the Berzois in history?"

She blinked excitedly through her thick glasses, expecting applause; but, alas! she received only laughter, and the laughter became so great that the other girls looked in to see what was the matter.

"My goodness! Is this a riot?" Phyllis Howell wanted to know.

"Oh, no; only Bessie and the Berzois. She wants to write a play about them," explained Jemima.

"I thought they were a kind of dog," said Phyllis.

"Shush! Bessie doesn't know that," whispered Clara.

"Yes, I do. I meant whatever it really is."

"Borgia?" suggested Barbara.

"That's it. They poisoned people. I think it's a jolly ripping idea!"

"Oh crumbs! Don't you start up in business as a poisoner," said Clara nervously. "You might have Cicely imitating you, and then where would Mabs be—oh?"

"Yes, that's so," nodded Phyllis Howell. "That girl really does seem to be beyond the edge!"

"Mabs won't mind," said Freda Foote, who had added herself to the crowd. "Like most actresses, she has no poise off, and plenty of poise on."

Clara threw a book, and there was a general groan for Freda's pun.

"Seriously, though," said Barbara, "we might do something with the Borgias, I suppose. She was a goodish sort of character, and we needn't stick true to history, need we?"

"Hear, hear! Let's have potted history," said Jemima, "just to see what the mistresses say—what?"

"Oh, rather!"

"Ripping!"

Clara clapped her hands at that idea, and Barbara laughed. It would certainly be queer, they agreed, if they muddled their historical facts, and the mistresses would indubitably have something to say about it.

"Only," said Clara, "shall we get away with it? You know what mistresses are, don't you? They're always butting in, and directly they know it was an historical thing, we'd have to have everything right—costumes, and so on."

"Let Bessie write it," said Barbara; "then all the facts will be wrong, anyway."

"Let's all write it," suggested Phyllis. "All do a bit, you know, an' crib things out of Shakespeare and Milton, and make a real rag of it. What do you say, Mabs?"

Mabel Lynn came to with rather a start. She had been immersed in her own thoughts, and had not been listening for the last few moments. All about her there had been enthusiasm; but she had not been affected by it at all. In fact, she looked surprisingly miserable.

"Eh?" she asked. "I—I didn't quite hear."

Phyllis repeated her suggestion, and Mabel nodded her head.

"Yes," she agreed, rather listlessly. "Why not?"

"Well," Phyllis answered, and paused, being rather surprised by Mabel's manner. "It's up to you, you know, Mabs! You're going to play the lead. You can choose any sort of part—we don't mind."

"We can write anything," said Jemima, leaning back. "Another 'Hamlet,' another 'Macbeth,' or something light and snappy, like 'Charlie's Aunt.' But 'Lucretia Borgia' seems rather good. Nice Italian name, and a dash of poisoning always makes people feel at home."

"Unless we have a crime play," said Clara thoughtfully. "I'd like that. I'd be a detective—"

"I could," shrilled Bessie.

"No. You'd be the comic relief. You could be one of the dead bodies which fall out from behind pictures," said Barbara.

"Oh, really, I couldn't get behind a picture!"

For a while there was argument about whether they should have a "crook" play or not; but as it was really obvious from the first that Miss Primrose would never lend her support to such a thing, the idea was abandoned. For Miss Primrose would want to see the play rehearsed, would want to read the script before she agreed that they should be allowed to perform it in public.

"Perhaps something a little more gentle. Suppose we have something about a famous woman pioneer?" said Marjorie.

"G-Grace Nightingale!" shrieked Bessie excitedly. "That's it! Grace Nightingale rowing out to the rescue of wounded soldiers in the Battle of Ballyclava—ch?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The girls simply shrieked with laughter at that. If they wanted potted history—well, there it was!

"Bessie could be Grace Nightingale, the Lady with a Lamp," suggested Jemima artlessly.

In the height of the laughter that followed Freda Foote gave a sudden warning.

"Miss Prim," she whispered. And Cicely with her—looking blue. Look out!"

Miss Primrose was hardly likely to eat them; but the girls "looked out," and before many moments Barbara, Mabel, and Bessie were left alone in Study No. 4—alone, that is, until Miss Primrose's well-known warning cough was heard, and then her voice.

CHAPTER 12.

Connie is Not So Clever.

CICELY had gone to Miss Primrose with considerable forebodings. She had met Miss Primrose but once—on the evening of her arrival, and she was not at all sure how stern she was, and how she would take the news of this vendetta.

When Cicely had reached the study Miss Primrose was working, correcting Sixth Form papers, and she looked up with a smile. If it had been Fourth Form papers she might not have smiled, but the Sixth Form had a way of doing work extraordinarily well—almost as though they liked doing it that way.

"Well, Cicely, and what is the reason for this visit?"

"Connie Jackson sent me here, Miss Primrose."

Then, of course, the headmistress had looked serious. It was unusual for new girls to be sent to her. As a rule, their wrongdoings were so slight that they could easily be punished by a monitor, although it was an unwritten rule that new girls were treated with leniency in their first week.

"Indeed! That is rather strange. I trust you have not been misbehaving yourself?"

"I don't think so, Miss Primrose."

"Ah!" said Miss Primrose quietly, but in a voice that seemed just slightly tinged with rebuke. "Then we must wait to hear what Connie has to say. It is just possible that her idea of behaviour and yours may not coincide."

But the smile which accompanied Miss Primrose's remark took the sting from the words, but not the flush from Cicely's cheeks.

Cicely stood in the centre of the small room and looked around her as the headmistress resumed her work. For all that her conscience gave her no qualms, she felt strangely ill-at-ease. Miss Primrose was such an important person and this room was so scented with the savour of a court of justice that it was impossible not to feel strangely small and insignificant.

Most girls, when they were summoned to this room, answered the command with sinking hearts and nameless dread, for very few of them had clear consciences, and very few left the room without wishing that they

had not been so foolish as to have given cause to be sent there.

Miss Primrose was never unkind, nor was she ever stern without reason; indeed, her reputation for justice was such that girls who had left Cliff House years before returned to her to ask advice, knowing that it would be wise and well-considered.

But Cicely hardly knew Miss Primrose, and now she took good stock of the mistress, noting the firm set of her head, the strong, yet lissom, hands, and the neat severity of the room.

Outside, the strong September sunshine lit up the pleasant grass and the even paths. Girls were walking sedately across it, but running on the playing-fields in anything but sedate manner, for hockey practice was in full swing.

"I trust you will take no undue time in settling down, Cicely," Miss Primrose said at last. "It is a great change from the life you have been used to, but if you give it a chance you will learn how to enjoy it."

"Yes, Miss Primrose. I'll do my best."

Cicely shifted from one foot to the other uncomfortably. It seemed to her that the headmistress was able to look into her mind and divine her thoughts. Yet, really, was it possible that, with so many girls under her care, Miss Primrose could give careful study to them all?

"I hope so. And I hope you will make friends. I arranged for you to share a study with Barbara Redfern, because she is the most reliable, trustworthy girl in your Form, and now Mabel Lynn has returned I cannot imagine anything pleasanter for you."

Cicely changed colour, and it seemed to her only fitting that that remark should be followed up by Connie Jackson's approaching footsteps.

Connie knocked on the door and then entered, looking very important indeed, as though she had to make some serious charge, which rather went against the grain, but which she made because duty came first with her always. That was how she tried to look, but she did not deceive Cicely, and it may be that she did not deceive Miss Primrose.

"Now, Connie," said Miss Primrose, "let me hear all the details."

Her mouth twitched ever so slightly as she said it, and Cicely's heart leapt. Miss Primrose was at least starting with an open

mind, unprejudiced by the fact that a girl had been condemned.

"I'm afraid the details in this case are rather unusual," returned Connie, somewhat sharply, as near to rebuke as she dare. "Because this girl, out of wilful malice and spite, has damaged dresses belonging to another girl."

Miss Primrose sat bolt upright, startled.

"Really? This—is this is rather extraordinary. You have been here such a little while. How comes it, Cicely," she asked, looking the girl in the eyes, "that you have already conceived a dislike for a girl here?"

Cicely shook her head.

"I don't dislike any girl here, Miss Primrose," she said. "And I haven't destroyed anyone's dresses, or touched them at all."

Connie Jackson made a gesture of impatience.

"Perhaps you would like to hear the evidence, Miss Primrose?" she asked.

"Naturally."

Connie Jackson then recited from her notebook the outline of the facts, as she had gleaned them: that Cicely had been alone in the dormitory while the others were downstairs, merry-making, that when the girls had gone to bed they had discovered the dresses spoiled, and Cicely apparently asleep, although the fact that she had taken a good deal of waking made some of them—Marcia and Gwen—suppose that it was no more than a pretence.

"And is that all?" asked Miss Primrose.

"There is no mention of motive?"

"The motive?" said Connie. "Jealousy, because this girl thought she was getting on well with Barbara, and then Mabel came. Then revenge, because this girl has openly stated that she will have nothing to do with Mabel Lynn—has sworn enmity, in fact."

"But why?" asked Miss Primrose, looking at Cicely measuringly.

"Because," said Connie, saving her tit-bit to the last, in the manner of an epicure, "she thinks that Mabel's newly-gained things should be hers; because she believes that the Lynns are responsible for her own family's loss of fortune. It is a case of revenge, pure and simple."

Miss Primrose sat back in her chair, obviously surprised, obviously anxious to contemplate those facts before making any comment.

But Cicely did not intend to let Connie have it all her own way.

"It is all guesswork, Miss Primrose," she said hotly. "There is no proof at all. I did say, though, that I did not want to be friends with Mabel, and I do think that her father is responsible for our losing our money."

Miss Primrose pursed her lips and frowned.

"You have proof of that?" she asked.

"My grannie—my grandmother—told me, and she knows," said Cicely. "But, anyway, I didn't touch Mabel's dresses. I went straight to bed. On my honour, I did!"

Connie Jackson intervened, lest Cicely's earnest profession of innocence might have some effect, influencing Miss Primrose in her favour.

"There is other evidence—the evidence of her hand-towel being ink-stained, Miss Primrose," Connie said slyly.

"Ah! That seems to be more conclusive evidence, certainly."

"It was not my towel. Someone had exchanged it," said Cicely quickly.

Miss Primrose held up her hand for silence.

"Let us get this straight, Cicely. You dislike Mabel?"

"Yes—well, I dislike the Lynns."

"That is not the answer to my question. Do you dislike what you know of Mabel Lynn herself?"

Cicely hesitated, and then shook her head.

"I rather like her," she confessed.

"What nonsense!" cut in Connie quickly.

"My goodness, Miss Primrose!"

"Silence, Connie! Please allow me to conduct this matter myself," Miss Primrose said, and gave the mistress a reproving glance. "Now, Cicely," she added. "You are carrying on what seems to be a vendetta. You are hating the Lynns—you hate even the Lynns you have not seen, and about whom you know nothing."

Cicely shook her head.

"I don't hate any of them, Miss Primrose. But I can't honestly be friends with them, can I? It would be—be playing false to grannie. It would be disloyal. Knowing what I do, how could I be friends?"

Miss Primrose shook her head slowly.

"You must take people for themselves. You would not, I take it, be pleased if you were shunned because of some wrongdoing

of your grandfather—wrongly imagined, perhaps?"

Cicely bit her lip fretfully. She did not want to appear a stupid, vindictive girl, and yet, somehow, that was the impression that she had given the headmistress.

"Oh, but please, Miss Primrose, it isn't that I hate Mabel. I don't, really, but—I couldn't be friends if I tried. There would always be something between us. How could I accept an invitation to her home—and—remember ours—and—"

Cicely's lip quivered, and it was only by dint of great effort that she managed to control herself at all. Miss Primrose, noticing how deeply she was feeling, went to her.

"Of course—of course!" she said. "I understand all that, Cicely. I know how much you are suffering, and I am very, very sorry for you. But I think you have perhaps been misled; that in the heat of the moment, in the agony of despair, judgment has gone slightly astray. But to wreak vengeance on Mabel will not help at all—"

"But I didn't do it. That would be beastly. Really and truly, I didn't do it, Miss Primrose," Cicely cried earnestly. "It's all a mistake. It must have been—"

But even to save herself she could not possibly sneak on Marcia and Gwen, not even though she was convinced of their guilt.

Miss Primrose looked at Connie and then signalled to her that the interview was finished.

"I will talk it over with Cicely, Connie."
"Yes, Miss Primrose."

Connie swung out of the room, but she looked back through the half-open doorway at Cicely, and gave that girl a look of utter hatred.

"Well, Cicely," said Miss Primrose, when they were alone, "I think I must take you in hand and insist on your line of conduct. I do not approve of this vendetta, and I must say that the evidence against you in the matter of the dresses is very strong indeed. But I will overlook that, provided you are willing to make a fresh start. Are you?"

"Yes, yes, Miss Primrose: but I don't want you to think I spoiled the dresses."

"I will look into that matter most carefully, and even if I decide against you I will still treat the matter as completely in

the past, if you do as I say. And that is—make friends with Mabel Lynn."

Cicely stared, and her eyes rounded in horror.

"Oh, Miss Primrose! You—you would make me?"

But Miss Primrose smiled at that.

"Naturally I cannot make you feel friendship for any girl; but I can put you in a position to give yourself and her a chance. Therefore you are going into Study No. 4 with Barbara and Mabel. I am going to ask Barbara to see that you have a chance in any scheme that the Form has on foot. If you do not agree to this—well, really I cannot allow two girls to have this feeling of enmity. So in that case—"

Cicely's heart pumped madly. "In that case—?" What did those words portend? What could they mean but that Miss Primrose would not suffer her to remain at school?

"You came here to do your best to get on with the girls, and I understand to win a scholarship. Is that so?"

"Yes, Miss Primrose. I mean to win a scholarship."

"Then win the affection of the girls, too. Come, let us talk to Mabel Lynn."

And Cicely, feeling bewildered, defeated, and a little aggrieved, followed Miss Primrose from the study, wondering what Mabel would say, and if any good could possibly come of this.

CHAPTER 13.

When All Seemed Well!

BARBARA REDFERN, Mabel Lynn, and Bessie Bunter sprang to their feet when Miss Primrose entered the study, and the headmistress smiled at them in the pleasant way she had, a way of making them all feel that she was a friend, and not someone who was about to levy terrible punishments.

"Good-morning, Miss Primrose," they chorused.

"N-nice morning," added Bessie tactfully.

"Yes, Bessie, a nice morning," said Miss Primrose, looking about the study.

At once the three girls became conscious that the study could have been tidier, that there was no necessity to have quite so many books on the floor when there were

empty shelves, and that the jar of jam which Bessie had scraped clean did not look any too well on the mantelshelf.

But Miss Primrose seemed to observe none of those things, if they were to judge by her expression.

"A nice little study," she said. "And I think large enough for you four."

Mabel looked at Cicely, and Cicely looked back at Mabel.

"Yes, Miss Primrose," said Barbara.

"As a rule I do not interfere in the Form's affairs, Barbara. Cicely is a new girl, and is not used to school, so will you make it your especial duty to show her the ropes?"

"Of course, Miss Primrose, only——"

"Yes, I understand. Cicely has not been willing; but we have talked things over, and she realises that she has been a little hasty in her judgment. Isn't that so, Cicely?"

Cicely did not know what to say, so she nodded her head and looked terribly guilty and confused.

"I am sure that you are willing to be friendly with Cicely, Mabel," Miss Primrose said, "and will not take to heart anything which Cicely may, in the heat of the moment, have imputed against your family."

"Oh, no," said Mabel, without an amount of enthusiasm.

"And you, Cicely, will try to forget old grievances, I am sure, and be a member of this happy little family?"

Cicely swallowed her pride.

"Yes, Miss Primrose. I'll do my best, of course."

Miss Primrose looked from one to another, and Mabel brought her hand from behind her back. Cicely, somewhat stiffly, stepped forward, and the two girls shook hands.

"Hurrah!" said Bessie. "Sh-she's not in C-Coventry now, then?" she asked eagerly.

"Shush!" came a warning from Mabel and Barbara, but too late.

"No, Cicely is not in Coventry," said Miss Primrose quietly. "I wish you all to start the term afresh—if the grievance you have is the one I imagine it to be—about the dresses."

"Oh, yes, it was," said Barbara. "I suppose we were wrong. Sorry, Cicely."

"Sorry," said Mabel, a little dourly.

And then Miss Primrose went out of the study, closing the door quietly, feeling that

she had done the best thing possible. But the three girls in the study were not quite so sure, except, perhaps, Bessie Bunter.

"I s-say, what were you trying to tell me about your remittance Cicely?" she asked eagerly. "Something about t-ten shillings, wasn't it?"

"Dry up," urged Barbara, frowning. "Don't sponge, Bessie!"

Cicely smiled. She knew that she could buy Bessie's good will for ten shillings; but she had no intention of bribing her way into the affections of the girls, quite apart from the fact that she was hard up.

"Ten shillings? Well," she said, laughing, "that's rather a lot. How much is your remittance for?"

"Nothing," said Mabel. "You don't know Bessie yet."

Bessie, considerably aggrieved, sat down in the armchair.

"I've never met such a mean crowd," she said wrathfully. "I jolly well won't write that play now. You know you can have the whole pound when it arrives!"

"I'll lend you ten shillings," offered Cicely, "if you promise to pay it back in a week."

"Done!" said Bessie, jumping up, gaily once more coming into its own.

"Done's the word!" agreed Barbara. "But we're not going to let you 'do' Cicely. Here's a shilling. Run and get some toffee, Bessie. Bye-bye!"

Bessie looked at Cicely, took the shilling, and disappeared. One shilling's worth of toffee was not to be ignored, and she knew that Barbara was a girl of character. If that offer were not accepted at once it would be withdrawn, and, anyway, the ten shillings might be obtained later.

The three girls stood silent in the study after Bessie had gone. They were all obviously uncomfortable, and Mabel's face bore a rather set look. She had not forgotten the insinuation regarding her father, and Cicely had not apologised.

"Well," said Barbara, after a long pause. "we may as well start jotting down the cast of the play. Cicely must have a part. Have you ever acted, Cicely?"

"Oh, yes, at home! But I say," she added, "I—I don't want you to give me parts just because Miss Primrose said so. Not if you don't want to, that is. And if you'd rather I weren't in here much—well, so far as I am concerned, I'll——"

Mabel spoke then.

"Yes, it might be rather awkward for you," she said coldly. "You might be contaminated, mightn't you?"

Cicely went crimson, and Barbara looked distressed, murmuring something quite inaudible.

"I didn't mean that," said Cicely quietly.

"Still, you think my father is a swindler, and that it runs in the blood, don't you?"

Cicely shrugged her shoulders.

"And I don't see how I can be friends with any girl who thinks that my father—" Mabel began, and then broke off. It was obvious that she was deeply moved, and tears glistened in her eyes. "If you know my father you'd never say such a thing—would she, Babs?"

"Of course not," Barbara agreed, getting out a sheet of paper and pencil. "Cicely doesn't know him. It's all a mistake. She's said she's sorry."

"She hasn't said it to me, and she hasn't said it to all the others," said Mabel. "You know that it will be all over the school, and there are girls only too ready to believe it. Marcia and Gwen, for instance."

Cicely looked at Mabel, and she felt miserable. Also she felt rather a pig.

"But, you see, I didn't say anything I never meant to," she protested. "Really, it was Connie who forced it out, and I don't know how she guessed. Really, I don't know."

"That's true enough," admitted Barbara, with a look at Mabel.

Barbara was trying not to take part in this. If she took sides with Mabel, then it might easily degenerate into a "row," and she certainly could not side with Cicely. She wanted, as usual, to be fair, and she wanted peace.

"Well, yes, I admit that," nodded Mabel. "But it doesn't alter the fact that it's out, and that Cicely has supported it, does it?"

Cicely sighed.

"But what can I do?" she asked plaintively. "I'm sorry, Mabel. I don't want to hurt your feelings. I really did not want to make all this horridness. I simply meant to go my own way. Only that wasn't possible."

"Unfortunately," said Mabel.

"As it turned out, yes," admitted Cicely candidly.

They both admired her for her honesty, and Mabel Lynn, for the moment, weak-

ened in her decision to demand an apology from the girl.

"Oh, well, it's happened, and it's beastly for me," Mabel said. "But I don't think you meant to be mean about it, Cicely. I think you're a duffer to think my father's a swindler, and I've a jolly good mind to ask him here so that you can see what—what a ripper he is," she added, her voice faltering.

Cicely was touched.

"I'm sure he is," she said, and then blushed, feeling foolish. "I'm sure he's ripping to you," she amended. "Of course, he is. My father died when I was very young. I've never known my father."

"Then you don't understand," said Barbara quickly. "That's what it is. I know how mad I'd be if anyone said anything against my father."

"Or anyone said anything against your grandmother," put in Mabel.

Cicely smiled faintly.

"I suppose I do seem silly," she said. "And I'll try to be sensible. I'll try to be friends, and I'm sure it won't need much trying," she added.

The ice was broken, and there were sunny smiles. Barbara Redfern could have danced with joy, and she took Mabel and Cicely by the arm.

"Come on," she said. "We're going to be friends. The bell will go for dinner in a minute, children. Let's go for a stroll in the quad."

Cicely rather wanted to cry, but not with misery—with relief. She did not know quite why, but a load seemed lifted from her mind at a time when it should have been heavier. Here she was going against her principles—being friendly with Mabel Lynn; and not only friendly with Mabel, but boasting that friendship to the whole school by walking with her, arm in arm.

Was she pleased, or was she annoyed, that as she walked past her old study Gwen and Marcia were standing in the doorway? She did not quite know; but she held her head high, and those two exchanged looks.

What were they feeling? Were they dreading the outcome of the truth? Did they think that they had already been found out, or were they planning fresh subterfuges, designing fresh schemes to put off detection? Hand in hand with Connie they undubitably were.

Mabel laughed, Barbara laughed, and

Cicely joined with them, not caring what Marcia and Gwen did now.

And yet it would have paid her to care, for no sooner was she gone from sight than Marcia turned to Gwen urgently.

"Go on—quick! Take her books in there!"

"No. Leave them here, silly! Put the thing in and leave them here."

"Oh, all right!"

Marcia picked up one of Cicely's books from the table, a book she would need that afternoon, and opened it. Then she groped on the table for a cutting from a newspaper.

"Put it in," said Gwen anxiously, "before someone comes."

"No. Let's read it again," said Marcia.

"It's worth a second reading. Lucky Connie had the paper. This is how he guessed about Mabel's father. Phew! What a sensation when this falls out of Cicely's book!"

"Yes, yes; but put it in," said Gwen. "We don't want to be found with it, silly! We want them to think she's downing Mabs."

But Marcia, with relish and joyfully, read aloud:

"MR. JAMES LYNN ARRESTED.
THOUSANDS OF POUNDS INVOLVED.
PITIFUL STORIES OF VICTIMS.
WIDOW'S PATHETIC STORY."

Marcia looked at Gwen.

"This will be Mabs' finish," she said delightedly. "Absolutely her finish!"

And Marcia Loftus put that newspaper cutting into Cicely's book and closed it, putting it between two others. And when that book was opened in class, and Cicely naturally enough read the cutting, and was ordered to take it to Miss Bullivant—

It would, indeed, as Marcia had prophesied, be the finish of Mabel Lynn!

CHAPTER 14.

The Blow Falls!

THE Fourth Form trooped into lessons that afternoon regretfully. The Fourth usually did; for, after all, the sun was shining very brightly, and the tennis courts were deserted, and the hockey field a splendid, inviting green.

With many sighs, the bell's summons was answered, and not the least of these sighs came from Barbara Redfern, Mabel Lynn, and Cicely Jerome.

Cicely had been shown all round the school, and, of course, there had been much to see. She had visited the playing-fields and inspected the grass, doing her best to give a learned opinion as to its condition. Then they had looked over the tennis courts, thrown a ball at Phyllis Howell, who was practising a service, and hurriedly departed.

The gymnasium, the clock tower, the model kitchen, and even the school kitchen came in for inspection; although as to the latter, the cook was in charge, and had a few words to say about the girls going where they had no right to be.

However, Bessie had not been with them, or there might have been suspicion regarding some cakes that were being made.

"And there's the bell," Barbara said. "Lessons."

"Lessons!" sighed Mabel. "If only we could do without lessons, what fun life would be, Babs."

"You did without them while you were on tour," smiled Barbara.

"I had lessons even then, and there wasn't any fun attached, as there is here. It's the Bull this afternoon."

"Groans for the Bull!" added Cicely, and they all three groaned.

"Yes, if it were Jancy I could bear it," agreed Barbara; "or if it were French. French is stunning—no work and plenty of fun!"

"French last lesson," Mabel reminded Barbara. "So cheer up, children, and look bright."

They went arm-in-arm back to the school, and were met by Clara Trovlyn and Jemima Carstairs.

"Buck up, slackers!" said Clara.

"Best leg forward!" urged Jemima. "Beware of the Bull. I hear we're going to go into this 'x' business again."

"What, old 'x' still missing?" asked Mabel. "Haven't found it while I was away?"

"Alas, alas! We never shall!" sighed Jemima. "Soon as one is found there's another. But cheer up, me gals, 'tis to glory we sail!"

They darted along to their studies for books, and then regathered on the staircase leading down to the Form-room. There

was a hurrying and scurrying all over the school, and the girls did not look really risorable, despite the fact that lessons were beginning.

The term was getting nicely into swing now, and mistresses were, as Jemima said, getting into their stride, and finding the faults they spent their lives looking for.

Miss Bullivant was sitting at her desk when they arrived, and she frowned at them.

"Hurry up, hurry up! Get into your places at once!"

Cicely found her place and sat there, hardly knowing what to think about things. Barbara and Mabel were not far away, and the girls she liked best were quite near her. While Miss Bullivant sorted out good pieces of chalk from bad, Cicely glanced about her.

The windows were on her right, and through them she could see the pleasant lawns and the gravel drive up to the school, and the tall trees in the distance. The leaves of the trees were just beginning to turn with the tint of autumn. But although Cicely usually thought that a rather sad time of the year, she did not feel at all sad at the moment. She felt rather happy.

The others might groan about lessons; but how much better it was to have lessons in company with such girls than alone with a governess! How much jollier!

There was laughter at a ridiculous gasp of fright from Bessie Bunter as Miss Bullivant had addressed the fat girl. If Miss Bullivant had bitten her Bessie could not have made more fuss.

"Don't make that absurd noise when I address you, Bessie. What are you fumbling with in the desk?"

"Fum-fumbling? W-was I f-fumbling?" asked Bessie.

"Yes, you were fumbling. Take your hand out of the desk at once! Now! Open your books at once! Page one hundred and four."

There was a rustle as books were opened, and Cicely found the page and looked up. But she had found something else, too, and she looked down again.

What she had found was, of course, the newspaper cutting that Marcia and Gwen had slipped in, and now she stared at it wonderingly. She saw first the reverse side, which said only "Keep that School-girl Figure," and was obviously part of an advertisement. How it had got into her new book she could not imagine.

But as she looked she suddenly remembered Bessie, and stole a glance at the fat girl. What splendid advice for Bessie!

Cicely caught Clara's eye and smiled. Clara winked. Clara, of course, was ready for anything to alleviate the dullness of lessons, and as Miss Bullivant had now turned to the board all was well.

Miss Bullivant, when she started to scribble on the board, often forgot that the girls were there, so deeply interested was she in the problems. Consequently, Clara lounged back, Jemima replaced her monocle, and Bessie Bunter's hand stole again into her desk, groping for a bag of toffee. All the while Miss Bullivant kept on talking, but so fast and with so little explanation that, quite unable to follow her, the girls gave up the effort, and just said "Yes, Miss Bullivant," or "No, Miss Bullivant," just as she appeared to feel about it herself.

Cicely slipped the piece of paper to the girl next to her, Phyllis Howell. Phyllis was at that moment arranging a small ball of paper to flick across to Philippa in the next desk, a miniature game of tennis with rules of its own, and only interrupted when the rest of the Form were saying "Yes" or "No, Miss Bullivant," and Phyllis and Philippa felt constrained to join in.

At first the game was too engrossing for Phyllis to notice the paper. Then she took it up and looked inquiringly at Cicely, who nodded towards Bessie.

Phyllis passed it to Philippa, who looked at it in surprise. In the process of passing it had been turned over, and now Philippa gave a gasp.

"Philippa!"

Miss Bullivant spun round from the board and, too late, Philippa tried to hide the cutting. Cicely groaned and sighed. But she did not really mind. Indeed, she rather wanted to be lined by the Bull, to prove to them all that she was not a prig who was afraid of offending mistresses.

Clara looked at Cicely, and made a grimace to express sympathy; Barbara shook her head playfully in rebuke; while Jemima smacked the back of her hand.

Miss Bullivant looked at Philippa, and motioned to her to step out to the front.

"Bring with you that piece of paper." Philippa hesitated; but the order had to be obeyed; and, with a quick glance at Mabel Lynn she marched out to the front and placed the paper on the mistress' desk. Purposely she turned it upside-down.

Miss Bullivant, adjusting her glasses to a closer focus, read aloud:

"Keep that Scholgirl Figure."

"M-me?" asked Bessie, starting up.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence! Philippa, why were you passing this ridiculous thing across the Form? Where did you get it?"

Miss Bullivant turned it over, and then her expression changed. For on the opposite side was the account of the arrest of Mr. Lynn, and the paragraph had been cut out so neatly that it was obviously that which had been selected from the paper, and not the advertisement, of which only a portion showed.

"Ah, I see! It is this side which is important. Philippa"—the mistress looked up sternly—"am I to understand that you have been passing this round the Form?"

"It was passed to me, Miss Bullivant."

"By whom?"

"I'd rather not say."

"I passed it first, Miss Bullivant," Cicely spoke up.

Miss Bullivant looked at her keenly, and then smiled in a way that perplexed Cicely, so grim and sour it was.

"Well, I might have guessed it. How many girls have read this report?"

There was surprise then, and none was more surprised than Cicely. What report was that? she wondered. No, girl, however, raised her hand.

"You have read it, Philippa?" the mistress asked.

"Most of it, Miss Bullivant. I didn't mean to pass it on, though, of course. That would be a horrid thing to do!"

Everyone was looking at Cicely now, and wondering what she had done—that that newspaper cutting contained. If no one had read it, everyone was wishing that they had, as was quite evident. But Cicely was looking confused.

"I am ashamed of you, Cicely," said Miss Bullivant. "Is it not enough for a girl to be disgraced, without broadcasting the details of her father's shame?"

Miss Bullivant looked sideways at Mabel Lynn; and, of course, attention changed from Cicely to her. Mystery was, however, redoubled. Disgrace! What was all this about? Cicely, as much as anyone else, wondered that. What was it all about?

"You have my sympathy in this matter, Mabel," said Miss Bullivant; "and if you wish to be excused lesson you may."

It was not unnatural, in the circum-

stances, that the mistress should imagine that what the papers knew Mabel knew in advance; but she was wrong. Mabel knew nothing at all about it, and looked quite bewildered in consequence; but no more bewildered than Cicely did.

"I—I don't understand," said Mabel.

Miss Bullivant raised her eyebrows.

"What! Don't you know that your father—" Then, realising that she was saying too much, she broke off: "Then I will say no more about it."

But, of course, it could not be left like that at all. Mabel now was thoroughly alarmed. Her fright showed in her face as she jumped up, white-checked.

"My father—has anything happened to him? An accident?"

She was so frightened that Miss Bullivant decided to hand her the paragraph to read.

"I am very, very sorry, Mabel," she said, in a far more kindly tone than they had heard her use before. "And if you wish to be excused the remainder of the lesson, you may. In any case, you would learn this—probably from other girls."

Mabel Lynn took the cutting, read the headline, and then staggered back.

"My father arrested—arrested for fraud! Oh, he can't be! There's a mistake, it's all wrong. It's a wicked lie!"

She was white to the lips, and her eyes blazed, as she turned to face Philippa Derwent, who drew back in dismay.

"Where did this come from?" she demanded, and then suddenly remembering Cicely, faced that girl, to Philippa's relief.

Cicely jumped up in her place.

"I don't understand. That paper said—"

"This paper says that my father has been arrested for fraud," said Mabel chokingly. "It says—it says— Oh, you know what it says, if you passed it round the Form. I—I—"

She broke down then, covering her face with her hands, and the Form jumped up, restraint quite gone, excited and whispering, and questioning going on all at once. Miss Bullivant took Mabel by the shoulder, and then signalled to Barbara to take charge of her.

"Silence!" thundered the mistress. "Order, everyone! Sit down! Don't stand there shaking your fist at Cicely, Clara!"

But it was some moments before the girls did sit down, and Cicely was nearly in

tears herself, for so much had the others been talking that they had not heeded her explanations. But she addressed herself now to Miss Bullivant.

"I did not pass it on because of that. I didn't know it was there. I did it because of the advertisement. I meant Bossio to get it as a joke," she said.

"Nonsense!" retorted Miss Bullivant curtly. "You have behaved in a despicable way. I have heard that you are an enemy of Mabel's. Not another word, or you will be punished. Clara! Phyllis!"

And so order was restored. But Cicely sat in her place, her face like marble, her heart beating furiously. She was only just beginning to comprehend what everyone was thinking—that she had cut out that paragraph, and that she had passed it round the Form in triumph! And what the others felt about that—well, it was only too obvious.

CHAPTER 15.

Not Wanted!

"MABS darling, don't—please don't!" pleaded Barbara, as Mabel Lynn lay in the armchair of her study and cried as if her heart would really break.

There was little enough that Barbara could do—little enough that she could say to console her friend. For that dreadful paragraph could not have been an absolute libel. It was too circumstantial and too matter-of-fact.

Suppose it were true? Barbara wondered. After all, Cicely had hinted at something very much like it. If Mr. Lynn went to prison, why, then, Mabel's career at school would be finished. She would be pointed out in disgrace! Never would she be able to hold up her head again.

Barbara had done the best she could to stem her friend's tears—done all that was possible to assure her that there might be a mistake, and now it remained for her to think what might happen next, and what would be best for them to do.

Barbara had to do all the organising, and her young shoulders had often had to bear a heavy burden of responsibility. She foresaw now all manner of difficulties, but her immediate thoughts were of Cicely Jerome.

After their reconciliation, for Cicely to have done this! How mean and despice-

able! And yet how utterly unlike her! But that made it worse, because there was no doubt that she had done it, and, therefore, all that Barbara could think was that Cicely was an utterly unreliable girl—a hypocrite.

Mabel raised her face from the cushion, and Barbara stooped down, dabbing her eyes and trying to be cheerful.

"Poor old Mabs!" she whispered softly. "I tell you it's all a mistake. It's another man, of course."

But Mabel would not be comforted, and now, repressing her sobs, she sat up and looked across their small study.

"It's true! It's true! Cicely has been hinting at it all along. But daddy isn't guilty. They'll find that out. They're jealous because he has got rich, that's what it is!"

"That's what it is," agreed Barbara, who would have assented to anything that was likely to give Mabel comfort. "Of course that's it, dear. And it will all come out, and he'll be cleared."

Mabel bit her lip fretfully, and twisted and untwisted the wet hanky that was in her hands. She was thinking of all manner of things—of what the girls would say; of how her mother would be suffering at home. How beastly everything would be until her father's name was cleared!

"It'll be all over the school!" she said, her lips quivering.

"No, no! We must make them keep quiet," said Barbara. But she must have known really that that was hopeless. It would be all over the school—and by tea-time, too!

"And Cicely—Cicely found it and passed it round after—after—" Mabel broke off, and then looked up at Barbara. "She must have heard rumours about it before she came here."

"I suppose she must!" frowned Barbara. "But they're all wrong."

"She thinks my father has robbed her of her money and her home! Oh, but daddy wouldn't do that! He simply wouldn't! It's beastly of them to say it."

Mabel started to walk up and down the study in restless excitement, and Barbara walked with her. Suddenly Mabel stopped and turned to Barbara.

"Babs, I want to send a telegram, or telephone or something. I must find out the truth. Oh, I must! I shall go crazy if I don't!"

"Easily done," said Barbara, in her com-

forting way. "I'll do it for you, dear, shall I?"

"No, no! I will. I want to talk to mummy. Poor darling, she will be in such a state! I wish I could go home. I wish I had stayed at home."

"Oh, Mabs!" Barbara slipped her arms round her friend's shoulder and sighed. "But I know what you mean. Listen, dear! We'll go and phone and see if it's true. That's all we can do. First lesson will end in a minute."

That was a warning, and Mabel certainly did not want to meet the other girls yet. She wanted most of all to telephone home and obtain reassurances. But her face was tear-stained, and the last thing she wanted was that the others should see her in this state.

"I've got to put a brave face on it, Babs," she muttered. "I mustn't seem depressed."

"That's the spirit!" cheered Barbara. "Stiff upper lip, as Jemima always says. Chin up and a straight left. Just treat the whole accusation with scorn."

"And contempt," added Mabel. "That's the line I'm going to take. I don't look as though I've been crying?" she pleaded.

But, of course, she did; she looked as though she had been crying her eyes out—which she had.

Barbara, of course, was tactful, and suggested remedies—such as cold water, and gentle sponging, and opening the eyes and shutting them tight—to make "smile wrinkles."

Mabel did everything possible when they went up to the dormitory. The bell for the end of the first lesson rang, and they decided to stay away from second lesson and risk getting into a bother. Mabel would be excused, anyway, and Barbara was not going to leave her friend alone now.

They did not expect to see any of the others, because the lessons went straight on one after the other, except for the moment or two when they might be without a mistress. But they received a visitor, all the same.

It was Cicely Jerome.

Cicely had left the Form-room close upon Miss Bullivant's heels, and before the girls had had a chance to ask her questions. First, in frantic haste, she had gone to Mabel's study; and then, guessing the

next likely spot, she had made her way to the dormitory.

When she entered Mabel had finished her task of hiding the traces of tears, and looked just haughty and defiant, while Barbara frowned.

"Oh, here you are!" Cicely said. "Thank goodness I've found you!"

"Well?" said Mabel coldly. It was not a good reception, but it was what Cicely had expected.

"I want to explain about that paragraph. I didn't know what it said. I found it in my book—really I did. And then I saw that about keeping a schoolgirl figure, and it tickled me so I wanted it passed to Bessie to see," she explained breathlessly. But she said, it, too, with a sinking heart, knowing that Mabel was not listening at all sympathetically, and had shown signs of disbelief.

"That's what you say," Mabel returned, when Cicely had finished. "But you don't expect me to believe it, surely? Of course you know what it said on the paper. Philippa read it. Why not you? And isn't it what you have been saying? Aren't you glad now that you've got proof—well, anyway, proof that other people think the same?"

Cicely looked quite pathetic then. She was miserable at heart, and near to tears herself out of sympathy for Mabel.

"No, I am not glad," she said, in a low voice. "I'm not glad, Mabel; I'm frightfully sorry. I know what it must mean for you, having your home sold up."

Cicely said that from the bottom of her heart. Her own home had been sold up. And if Mr. Lynn went to prison—if he had to make good that money—well, Mabel would suffer all that Cicely had suffered and worse. It was pure sympathy, and yet it was not taken as that. But Mabel was as justified in her way of taking it as Cicely had been in her offer of sympathy.

"My goodness! Rub it in!" said Mabel. "You want me to see all that it is going to mean!"

"Yes, for goodness' sake, dry up!" added Barbara sharply.

"I wasn't rubbing it in. Oh, Babs—Mabel, I didn't mean it like that!" Cicely pleaded.

"Well, what else did you mean?" asked Mabel bitterly. "It's your hour of triumph, of course. You've lost all your money, and

now you think I'm going to lose mine. I suppose it's only natural you should crow!" she ended unhappily, and sank down on the bed, very near to tears again.

Cicely clenched her hands.

"I wish you wouldn't misunderstand me. I'm not trying to crow—I'm not really, Mabs! I'm ever so sorry!"

"I don't want your pity. For goodness' sake go!" Mabel cried furiously.

Barbara pointed to the door.

"Yes, go, Cicely," she implored. "You can't expect us to believe that you've turned so suddenly. I thought you were friends before dinner, but now that this proof has come—well, naturally you don't take back what you have said. You hate Mabel."

"I don't—oh, I don't!" cried Cicely. "Oh, Mabs, won't you understand me? I didn't send that piece of paper round knowing what it had on it. If I had seen that I'd have torn it up—I would, really."

"But you think my father guilty?" asked Mabel.

Cicely sighed.

"Yes, I do, because— But Mabs, it's not your fault. I'm not blaming you."

But Mabel turned her back on her, and Cicely went out of the dormitory, her heart heavy. In the corridor she paused, realising that nothing could be gained by staying, heedless of the fact that she should have gone down to lessons. Her mind seemed in such a whirl that she hardly knew what to think at all.

It was true, all that she had hinted. Mabel Lynn's father was responsible for their loss of fortune. It was his fault that their home had been sold up. She said that she hated him. Well, his wrong was still the same, and there was proof now. Did she not hate him?

She could not find it in her heart to deny that. She did hate him. He had ruined not only her grandmother, but hundreds of others. How could one help hating a man like that? But Mabel—poor Mabel—she had done no wrong, and yet she was to suffer for the wrongs of her father! For Mabel, Cicely felt the deepest sympathy. She was living through again, for Mabel, all that she had suffered when the first blow had fallen upon her own home.

Now the tables were turned. The biter was bitten. He, who had ruined homes—if the report were true—was himself ruined.

Now was the time to be triumphant, to feel that vengeance had been done—if one could ever feel that way; but Cicely could not. Especially could she not hate Mabel Lynn.

And hatred just now Mabel might have borne. She might have felt that Cicely, believing what she did, was justified. But pity—sympathy, she could not bear that. It was like heaping coals of fire on her head.

But who would understand how Cicely felt? Who would believe that inwardly she was not crowing? Who would ever believe that it was not she who had cut that paragraph from the paper and broadcast it? And who, now, would doubt that she had spoiled Mabel's dresses out of revenge?

Yet it was not of those things that Cicely thought as she went back to the Form-room to receive punishment for her absence, but of Mabel Lynn; of what would happen to her; for now her first liking for Mabel, half-stifled by her dislike of Mr. Lynn, had grown into something stronger. Mabel was her chief concern—it was Mabel who had to be studied now!

CHAPTER 16.

Public Opinion!

THE news was all over Cliff House by tea-time, even as Barbara had said that it would be. There was not a Form that did not know about Mabel's father. Some girls even went to the length of buying newspapers, although that was against the rules.

Connie Jackson probably had something to do with it; but there really was a considerable number of newspapers fluttering about in the school.

Could it be true? That was the question that everyone asked. And the answer that almost everyone gave was that it was in the paper. And if papers printed things, they were true. That, after all was said and done, was a fundamental truth.

Graco Woodfield, whose father was a newspaper editor, said that everything that appeared in a newspaper was absolutely truth—so obviously it was. If the Fourth had only heard that, they would have immediately declared that everything that was published in a newspaper was clearly an untruth. But they were not concerned

with Grace's dictums then, they were worried about the news.

What a sensation, if it were true!

In next to no time it came to be whispered about the school that some girls' parents had been ruined in the general smash, and that their loss of fortune was directly attributable to Mr. Lynn.

There was a girl in the Third Form, it was said, who had not been able to return to Cliff House simply because her father had been swindled by Mr. Lynn. And then, naturally enough, it was said about every girl who had not returned to Cliff House after the previous term.

In most of those examples there was no vestige of truth at all; but rumours were apt to fly at Cliff House, and lose nothing at all in transit.

All told, Mabel Lynn felt life was going to be unbearable.

She did not, naturally enough, hear all the stories that were current, but when she did go down to the post to send a long letter to her mother, she could not be unconscious of the looks she was receiving.

Wherever she went she attracted attention, and girls' heads would go together, and there would be a good deal of whispering. Seniors and juniors alike went out of their way to take a look at her, until she vowed she would stay in her study for good.

Barbara Redfern became very angry, and girls who tried to find out from Barbara how Mabel was feeling received very short shrift indeed. Barbara was standing by Mabel, and she was not going to take part in any kind of gossiping.

Very soon, however, almost before tea had been finished, Cicely's name was connected with Mabel's. Girls remembered they had heard something about Cicely hating Mabel, and of revenge.

Consequently, the Fourth Form corridor became a centre of considerable interest with those who wanted to find out the truth.

Fifth-Formers who pretended not to know that such a Form existed went down to have a chat, and the Fourth Form made the most of it, assuming mysterious, significant looks that suggested that they could say a good deal if only they wanted to.

Flora, Cann, the Fifth Form captain, tried to get the latest details, and had the good fortune to reach the Fourth Form

corridor just as Cicely Jerome came out of the study into the corridor, and Flora, who knew her by sight, called out:

"Cicely! Here!"

Cicely, her face pale, turned to face Flora. She remembered Flora quite well—remembered the day of her arrival at Cliff House, and Clara's pointing out the girl to her and saying that she couldn't do anything but swank. Flora's manner now was lofty in the extreme.

"I want to ask you about Mabel," said Flora, "whether it is true her father is a swindler."

"I don't know," said Cicely coldly.

"Well, it's true, isn't it, that your people lost their money through him?" persisted Flora. "Because we want to get to the bottom of all this. It's a pretty fine thing to have a girl here whose father is a criminal, you know."

She was not noticing Cicely, but Cicely's brows were knit in a heavy frown of anger. She could not see what it had to do with Flora Cann, and certainly she had no intention of gratifying that girl's curiosity.

"It's pretty fine to have a girl like Mabel here," agreed Cicely. "And it's a pity there aren't more like her."

"What? But I thought you hated her?" asked Flora, in amazement. "If it's true about her father, you must hate her!"

"I don't hate her," returned Cicely. "I'm sorry. I think she's having a very rough time," she corrected herself. "And all the decent girls are rallying round her, of course. It doesn't matter much what the others think, does it?" she asked, looking at Flora rather queerly, as though she included her in the latter category.

"H'm!" said Flora thoughtfully. "I suppose the Form is ashamed of her and doesn't like the rest of the school knowing. It'll ruin that concert you're getting up if Mabel plays the lead. Everyone will stay away—"

Cicely turned to walk away, and would have left Flora to talk to the empty air; but before she could go more than a step or two there came a rush of many steps on the staircase, and into the corridor poured Fourth-Formers and Third-Formers in a crowd.

"There she is!"

"There's Cicely!"

"She'll know!"

"Goodness, won't she be glad!"

Cicely drew back as the horde advanced and gathered about her excitedly, anxious for news.

"She know it all along," said one girl.

"Aren't you glad, Cicely, that the biter's bitten?" asked another.

"He's ruined thousands and thousands!"

And it was when they were clamouring at their most that two silent figures came up the staircase. One was Barbara Redfern, and by her side was a girl with a white, drawn face—Mabel Lynn.

"Was it your people who had him arrested, Cicely?"

"Yes, it was her people!"

CHAPTER 17. Misunderstood!

"MISS PRIM!"

"Look out!"

The crowd became suddenly silent. One or two girls tried to sneak into studies. Others belonging to other Forms could find no way of escape, so remained there, looking meek; but Cicely drew herself up and faced Miss Primrose fearlessly.

Miss Primrose regarded the crowd with grave displeasure.

"What is all this commotion? Why are you girls not starting your preparation? How dare you make such a noise!"

Marcia hung her head; Gwen tried to look as though she were an innocent party who had been hemmed in by the crowd when she had wanted to escape.

Miss Primrose surveyed them all, and she was probably not deceived by any of them. She had been in charge of girls for too many years not to know which were the black sheep amongst her flock.

"Is this a meeting?" she asked.

"In a way," admitted Marcia. "We were talking about Mabel Lynn."

"I thought as much."

"I suppose she'll have to leave Cliff House?" asked Agnes White boldly.

Miss Primrose gave Agnes a hard, measuring look, as Cicely saw; and it was clear to her, if not to the others, that Miss Primrose would allow no persecution. If the others did not understand that from her looks, her words left no doubt.

"I fail to see, Agnes, what business that

is of yours. I do not quite understand how you girls learned the news."

"From Cicely," said Marcia.

Cicely flared up.

"That isn't true at all."

But Miss Primrose held up her hand.

"Silence, Cicely. Miss Bullivant has already told me of what happened in the Form-room. Where you obtained the cutting from the newspaper I do not know, and I am not going to inquire. But I am disgusted that you should have endeavoured to brand one of your schoolfellows by circulating it."

"Oh, Miss Primrose, but I didn't!"

"Indeed, we saw you," put in Marcia.

Cicely turned upon her, eyes gleaming. She had had about enough of Marcia.

"Someone put it into my book," she said. "I saw the other side—an advertisement—and I passed it on, meaning Bossie to get it—"

"Oh! That's fine!" mocked Gwen.

"What a fibber!" said Agnes.

Miss Primrose spoke sharply and angrily.

"How dare you bicker in my presence! I will not have it! I know quite well what happened in the Form-room, and I am able to draw my own conclusions. But what I want you all to understand is that there must be no persecution of Mabel Lynn. Understand that, Cicely!"

Cicely started.

"I? I do not wish to persecute her, Miss Primrose!"

"As long as you do not do so, it will be all right. But I will tolerate nothing of the sort. Whatever Mabel's father may or may not have done, Mabel is not held to blame in any way, and please remember that until Mr. Lynn is proved guilty, he must be assumed innocent."

"Yes, Miss Primrose," said Cicely quietly, but her heart ached. That Miss Primrose should think her spiteful! Should imagine that she wished to triumph in this disaster and persecute Mabel—how hard it was, when her true feelings were of pity!

"And you, Cicely, I take it that you have changed your mind since this morning?" asked Miss Primrose.

"I have not, Miss Primrose. I want to be friends, but Mabel won't be friends with me."

Marcia Loftus winked, and nudged Gwen. Gwen Cook sniggered. And what conclusion could Miss Primrose draw from that,

Cicely wondered, but the one that those girls wished her to draw—that Cicely was telling untruths?

The look Miss Primrose gave Cicely showed that she had noticed those winks and the nudging, and had indeed inferred that Cicely was a hypocrite.

Cicely could have cried out with fury. But what could she do? She was helpless against these cunning schemers. How could Miss Primrose believe a word she said now? How could the headmistress understand her feelings in the matter?

"I quite appreciate your feelings with regard to your loss of fortune," said Miss Primrose, a little more kindly. "But, even so, there is never an excuse for vengeance. The law will take its course, and it is not for us to interfere in any way. Revenge is always despicable. Remember that, Cicely, and I am sure you will profit by it."

Miss Primrose turned away, and there was silence after she had gone, broken only by Marcia's restrained giggling. Cicely looked after the headmistress, and then walked after her.

Marcia caught her sleeve, and then Cicely wheeled round with such a blaze of anger in her eyes, and her hand drawn back so menacingly that Marcia really feared she was going to be struck.

But the blow did not fall. Cicely dropped her hand to her side, freed herself from Marcia's hand with a curt, contemptuous shake, and then walked down the corridor.

She was quivering with suppressed tears. She wanted to run after Miss Primrose and hold her by force until the true story had been heard. And yet what good would that do?

It was her own words that had brought about this unhappy situation. If she had not started by "cutting" Mabel, by naming her as an enemy, none of this would have happened.

"Oh, what a fool I was! I did feel vengeful—I did—and it was wrong!" she told herself miserably.

Aimlessly she wandered down the stairs into the hall, and paused there. Friends she could have if she would side with Marcia Loftus, Gwen Cook, and the others, but they were not girls she would have for friends.

The girls she really liked—Babs, Jemima, Clara, Marjorie, Phyllis Howell, well, they would have nothing to do with a girl who

persecuted Mabel! It was her own fault, she told herself, and there was nothing she could do. Even if she offered the hand of friendship, it would be accepted as patronising, offensive pity—just a way of showing that she was now top dog, just a way of underlining her revenge!

Was there nothing at all she could do? For Mr. Lynn she felt no sympathy, but he would not suffer alone. There was Mabel. Poor Mabel—her whole future was ruined. Always she would be labelled as the daughter of the swindler.

Worst of all, was it not her grandmother's solicitors who had brought the charge, who had raised it all up? It was she, then, and her own people, who were hounding down Mr. Lynn—and Mabel.

Suddenly she turned and looked across at the monitoresses' room. The telephone was in there. Suppose she telephoned to her grandmother and told her about Mabel. It was a sudden and seemingly brilliant idea. She had the wild hope that she might even now be able to end all this disgrace; that Mr. Lynn might be made to pay the money back in some way so that no one would be ruined.

"Oh, goodness—I wonder if it can happen?" she gasped. "It must! Oh, it must—and I shall have saved Mabel!"

She ran across the hall and burst open the door of the monitoresses' room after a hurried knock. Two girls were in there, talking angrily—Stella Stone and Connie Jackson.

They broke off sharply when Cicely entered, and she looked from one face to the other—from Stella to Connie. Stella had spoken to her kindly, but it was not a kind look that Stella gave her now.

"Well?" she said.

"Oh, please—please could I use the telephone? It's most frightfully important and urgent. I want to telephone my grandmother."

Stella pursed her lips. Connie shrugged her shoulders.

"I've got some work to do," said Connie sulkily, and then amazingly changed her note, almost as though an idea had occurred to her. "Still, if she won't be long—"

"Yes, you can use it," said Stella, and gave Cicely a look of great disapproval.

Cicely looked back at her, hurt and disappointed. Why hadn't Stella smiled? Why that frowning look? She watched Stella as the captain of the school went

out of the room, but Stella did not look back, and closed the door rather hard.

Connie Jackson gathered up her papers. "You needn't go," said Cicely. "If—if you're working, I mean!"

"Oh, I'll go," said Connie. "Mustn't hear anything that's important and secret. Got a new clue to hound down Mr. Lynn with? Is that it?"

"No," said Cicely sharply. "That is not it—quite the reverse, in fact."

"Going to save him?" said Connie, opening her eyes. Then she laughed. "Well, I suppose that would annoy Mabel more than anything—if you tried to save her father at this stage. The noble heroine relenting, and saving the villainess. Sort of Beau Geste, eh?"

"I'm not doing it for that reason. I think it's horrid of you!" said Cicely warmly. "Can't anyone believe I have a good motive?"

"Hardly," said Connie. "You ought to have heard what Stella was saying about you, too!"

"Stella—about me?" Cicely was aghast. "Oh, goodness! What was she saying? I noticed the look she gave me. Stella doesn't hate me? Oh, please say she doesn't! She's been such a brick!"

If Cicely had been wiser, she would have known that that was just enough to lead Connie on to make things seem very black.

"Hate you? Oh, well, Stella has prim ideas. She doesn't agree with vengeance, you know. Still, I don't blame you. It's your turn now, so naturally you wish to make the best of it, eh?"

"Stella thinks that?" gasped Cicely.

"Well, everyone does, and that's the truth. First the dresses, and now this little triumph!"

Connie went out of the room, leaving Cicely staring, and Cicely was standing there some minutes before she went to the telephone. But she did go at last, her face grim. Whatever they said, surely it was better to save Mr. Lynn than not? What did it matter what they said? Mabel would be glad, really.

But, alas! There were no London numbers in the telephone book, and too late Cicely realised that by now her grandmother would have left the hotel and found a flat. Letters would be forwarded, but not telephone messages.

"Oh, bother! And I can't, anyway. They'll think I was only boasting. Oh, goodness—what a mistake!"

She went crimson with shame at her foolishness. If only she had not let them know her intentions! Now it would look as though she had been bluffing.

Chagrined, she waited for a moment or two, and then went out of the room. Connie was not far away in the hall, and looked as though she had been nearer before the door opened.

"Finished?" asked Connie, with a sneer.

"Yes, thank you. I—I couldn't get the number."

"Oh, that was it?" and Connie gave a short laugh that made Cicely loathe her more than ever. She would have loathed her even more if she had known what took place next.

Connie, as soon as Cicely was on her way upstairs, went back into the mistress's room and took the receiver from the telephone.

"Friardale 49," she said, after consulting the local newspaper that lay on the table. A moment later she spoke again. "I want to speak to the news editor, please."

Anxiously she looked towards the door and then spoke quickly and in an altered voice into the mouthpiece.

"I thought you'd like to know that the daughter of the swindler, Lynn, is a Cliff House girl—at school now, in case you'd like to interview her."

That was all, and the receiver was hung up again. Three or four minutes later Stella re-entered the room, and looked surprised to see Connie there.

"That was a quick call for a trunk!" she said. "I came to fetch a book."

"I don't suppose it was a trunk-call," said Connie. "The kid was bluffing. More likely it was a local call."

Stella lifted the receiver of the telephone.

"What was the last call from here?" she asked. "To what number?"

"Friardale 49—the local newspaper," answered the girl.

Connie glanced up innocently and saw Stella frown heavily. But Stella did not say anything. Looking very grim, she went out of the room, and Connie winked at the wall and then settled down to her work, not at all perturbed by what she had done.

CHAPTER 18.

Nothing to Say!

CICELY kept to herself the next morning when the Fourth-Formers took the air before breakfast. For the Fourth Form was now divided into camps—those who meant to stand by Mabel, and those who meant to let her share her father's blame.

If she had wished, Cicely could have been quite a heroine. There were many girls in the school who would have liked a chat with her. She was pointed out as much as Mabel was, and in a different way. Everyone said "poor kid" when she passed by, and everyone knew that she had come to Cliff House because her grandmother had lost all her money through Mr. Lynn.

No one knew or cared how the money had been lost, or what Mr. Lynn had really done, but the word "swindler" seemed to fit the case, and Mabel became known quickly as the swindler's daughter. Cicely, of course, was the victim.

But Cicely did not want to be that sort of heroine at all. She looked yearningly towards the group of girls that escorted Mabel Lynn defiantly across the quadrangle, and she hoped that she did look yearning and not triumphant.

Having nowhere else to go, she strolled down to the gates, where Piper, the school porter, sat outside his lodge with one or two girls near.

"Do let's see the paper, Piper," urged Freda Foote. "Be a Briton, you know."

"Tain't allowed, Miss Freda. I know what you want to see. He'll get seven years all right."

"Mabs' father will? Seven years?" gasped Freda. "Oh, crumbs! Poor old Mabs!" And Freda, for once, was serious.

Cicely stood appalled, not realising that Piper was drawing on his imagination, and knew no more than anyone else whether Mr. Lynn would be adjudged guilty or innocent of the charges brought against him.

"Fancy, seven years!" said Freda, in hollow tones. "In prison! Fancy not seeing your father for seven years!"

"Goodness!" said Phyllis Howell mournfully. "How dreadful!"

Her eyes were soft with sympathy for Mabel.

"Pretty awful for them what's lost their savings in 'is wild-cat schemes," said Piper.

"Wild-cat schemes? Was he trying to sell wild cats?" asked Freda, not able to lose the chance of a little mild humour.

"No, he warn't," said Piper. "I can't tell you what it was all about, because it was complicated finance which you wouldn't understand."

Freda winked at Phyllis.

"Never mind. When we're grown up and as clever as Piper we shall understand all about finance," she said consolingly. "Won't we, Piper?"

"It ain't no laughing matter. There's Miss Cicely over there," said Piper, indicating her with his pipe. "She's lost all her money. It says so in the paper."

Cicely gave an excited jump and looked towards the group.

"My hat! Is that so?" asked Freda. "Phew! Aren't we getting famous, Piper! I lost sixpence down a drain yesterday. My photograph is not there, by any chance?"

"This ain't a comic paper, Miss Freda," said Piper. "Haw, haw, haw!"

"Isn't it?" asked Freda, rallying well. "Why, I thought your photograph was there—look!"

"That—that's an advertisement for 'Monkey Brand,'" said Piper.

Freda ran off laughing, with Phyllis Howell; and Piper, when the subtlety of the remark had dawned upon him, frowned heavily, and tried to think of a retort. But his eyes alighted upon Cicely, and he contorted his weatherbeaten features into a look of pity.

"Bad business this 'ere, miss," he said.

"Yes, very bad," said Cicely shortly.

"Shocking bad," Piper rambled on. "It's all about yer gran'ma in the paper. An' all about Mr. Lynn being arrested, too."

Cicely bit her lip vexatiously. If that were in the paper it would make it all more than ever an affair between the Lynns and the Jeromes. It would look more than ever like revenge!

"Got your own back, like," said Piper, and then jumped up as a man came in at the gate.

Cicely took a look at the man, and then stared at the large leather case he had with him. Another man entered the gate a second later.

"Good-morning!" said the first man. "This is Cliff House School?"

"It is," said Piper proudly, as though he had made it. "All of it is. And I'm the porter."

"Is Miss Mabel Lynn here, by any chance?" asked the second man. "We're from the local paper. I've been requested to obtain an interview with Miss Lynn. Here's my card."

"Reporters!" exclaimed Piper.

Cicely drew back. They were the very last people that she wished to meet. And Mabel! Surely they were not going to ask her questions? Poor Mabel!

But worse was to come. The man with the leather case had taken out a camera and was adjusting it.

"You can't come in here. Not going to take any photograph for the papers," said Piper. "Tain't allowed. Miss Primrose don't 'old with it."

"You're not Miss Lynn?" asked one of the reporters, turning to Cicely.

"I—oh, no! Miss Lynn's out," said Cicely primly. "I'm afraid you've come on a particularly hopeless quest."

"She's Miss Jerome," said Piper unthinkingly.

Both men started, and exchanged glances.

"Is that so—Miss Jerome? Then you're the granddaughter of Mrs. Jerome—is that so?"

Cicely looked from one to the other anxiously. But others had been attracted by these visitors, and now who should be coming across but Mabel Lynn and her friends, wondering what all this was.

"Will you let me have a photograph, miss?" asked the photographer.

"No, no! Please don't take me!"

Cicely covered her face with her hands, as the man raised his camera.

But now the other girls in the quadrangle, seeing a photographer, came hurrying forward. Marcia Loftus, Gwen Cook, Agnes White on one side, and, keeping away from them, Barbara Redfern, with Mabel Lynn, Clara Trevlyn and Jemima Carstairs.

Cicely drew away her hands, hearing the others; and the camera man gave a nod of satisfaction.

"And is Miss Lynn here?" he asked.

Cicely turned at once.

"Mabs!" she cried warningly, but she did not realise that she was doing the worst possible thing for Mabel.

"Oh, that's Mabs!" said the man; and click! went the camera again, while Mabel Lynn stared open-eyed, wondering what on earth it was all about, yet thinking that it was nothing to her advantage.

"I'm a reporter, miss," explained the other man. "And if there's anything you can say, I'd like to make a note of it. Just a few words, you know. All this came as a great shock to you, of course—about your father?"

Mabel Lynn stood and stared, while the crowd grew to tremendous proportions. Marcia Loftus and Gwen Cook exchanged excited glances, and struggled through the crowd to Cicely.

"Goodness! Now's your chance, Cicely," said Marcia breathlessly. "Spin them a long yarn. Go on, do!"

"Yes, do!" added Gwen. "They'll love it, of course. What fun! All in the local paper, and perhaps in a London paper, too."

Meanwhile, Mabel stared at the reporter, speechless.

"Just a few words, miss," he coaxed. "I have been asked to interview you on behalf of the paper."

Then Mabel Lynn found her voice.

"How dare you!" she exclaimed. "I won't say anything except that I love my father, and I know he is innocent. It's a wicked falsehood to say that he has robbed anyone! He is the dearest man in all the world!"

But the reporter was taking it all down in shorthand. It was just what he wanted.

Then Barbara squeezed Mabel's arm.

"It's all right," she said. "Here comes Stella!"

"Ware Stella!" said Marcia. "Go out into the lane with them, Cicely, and spin the yarn!"

But Cicely stood quite still, looking towards Stella Stone, who bore down upon the crowd, an angry expression on her face.

CHAPTER 19.

Miss Primrose Intervenes.

STELLA STONE advanced towards the group at the gates, and it was obvious that she was extremely angry. She was even more angry than Mabel Lynn herself, and Cicely struggled to free herself from Marcia and Gwen, who tried to push her forward.

"What is all this?" Stella demanded sternly, looking at the two men, and from them to Piper, the porter. "Piper, why did you allow these people in at the gates?"

"I couldn't help it, miss, I really couldn't. These 'ere reporters are so pushing—"

"Please leave this school immediately!" said Stella, turning to the reporters.

"Certainly. I think we've finished!" said the young man to his colleague.

"Oh, yes. I've all the information I require."

Mabel Lynn, her face white, struggled free from her friends.

"You are not to publish that photograph!" she cried fiercely.

"Sorry, but we have to obey orders!" said the man, with a faint smile.

They turned to the gates, and some of the girls gave a faint cheer, at which Stella spun round and, singling out ringleaders, scattered lines so briskly that the cheering died. She was not, however, finished with the reporters, for she followed them out into the lane, where the girls—at risk of receiving further punishment—went, too.

Stella did her very best to dissuade the men from making use of any information they had gained, and requested them to call upon Miss Primrose. But the men had a car waiting outside, and, thanking Stella, said that they really had to hurry back without delay.

Cicely stood back in the crowd, her heart pumping fast as she wondered what sort of report would appear in the paper. That poor Mabel's wretchedness should be made public seemed terrible to her, but she saw that no possible form of interference could do any good now. But how she hoped that Miss Primrose would be able to do something!

"Aren't you going to tell them anything?" Marcia Loftus whispered in her ear.

Cicely turned upon her in fury.

"Indeed, I'm not! Don't you think

Mabel is suffering enough? Have you no feelings at all!"

Marcia drew back, and then scowled.

"That's fine from you!" she jeered. "You seem to have a lot of feeling for Mabel, I must say! Why don't you tell them how much you love her, and how sorry you are her father's been arrested? You hypocrite!"

The engine of the car had been started, and the car had evidently made up their minds to go, so Stella Stone turned back to the school. She looked at the girls as though seeking for someone, and at once made for Cicely.

"Cicely," she said, "was it you who told the reporters that Mabel was at school here?"

Cicely gave a start of genuine surprise.

"I? Goodness, no, Stella!" she replied. "Why should I?"

The whole crowd had now turned its attention upon her, and she found that none too pleasant. As for Stella, her face showed her anger, and Cicely could have cried aloud to know that such a look was for her from Stella, whom she so much admired.

"Stella, you can't believe I did that?" she cried pleadingly.

"You will come to Miss Primrose with me!" said Stella. "You see, I happened to inquire in the mistress's-room what call had been put through after you used the telephone—and it was to the local paper!"

There was a murmur of amazement from the assembled girls. Mabel Lynn, who had been silent, surrounded by her friends, now gave an angry exclamation.

"Cicely, you!" she cried. "Oh, how could you!"

"My hat! If that isn't the limit!" said Clara. "I never heard of such a beastly trick."

"Shame!"

Cicely stared at Stella unbelievably, quite unable to make head or tail of what she had heard. She knew quite well that she had not made a telephone call at all, since she had forgotten her number, and how Stella could say such a thing passed her comprehension.

"But—but I didn't have a call at all!" she managed to gasp. "I didn't, really! I—I forgot the number!"

A murmur came from Marcia at that. "Better tell a better one than that!" she

said behind her hand, but in a voice that carried well. "Stella's not a fool!"

"Yes, you had certainly better find some other excuse if you want to be believed!" said Stella angrily. "I have never heard anything more spiteful in my life!"

Cicely did not move.

"You hear me?" asked Stella grimly.

"But, Stella, it isn't true at all! I didn't have a call—I didn't speak! It must have been someone else. Oh, Stella, please believe me!" she cried in distress; and then, in despair, she turned, appealing to Mabel. "Oh, Mabs, you do believe me?" she pleaded.

For answer Mabel Lynn turned her back; and her friends turned almost as one with her. Even the others did not seem inclined to believe her, and there were murmurs from the crowd which showed that the general feeling was that Cicely had behaved abominably.

"Little humbug!" said Freda Foote, in disgust.

"Lying her way out of a scrape!" added Gwen Cook jeeringly.

That was precisely what Stella thought, and she took Cicely unceremoniously by one arm.

"Come along to Miss Primrose at once!" she commanded.

There was nothing for Cicely to do but obey, and although she felt that she could not hold back her tears, she somehow gained control of her feelings and walked with Stella proudly, head in air.

Not a word was said until Miss Primrose's private house was reached. The headmistress, from her window, had seen the crowd at the gates, and was on her way down the garden to see what it was all about when Stella arrived.

The headmistress quickly explained what had happened, and Miss Primrose became exceedingly grave.

"This is very serious, Stella. We cannot possibly allow these photographs and reports to appear. I must go at once to Friardale to see the editor. But how over did they connect Mabel with Cliff House?"

Stella looked at Cicely.

"Cicely can explain that. She asked permission to use the telephone yesterday in order to call up her grandmother; but I found afterwards that it was a local number she had called—the newspaper office. I did not guess why at the time—but the reason is obvious now."

Miss Primrose's expression altered while she listened to that recital, and what had been dismay now became anger. She looked more angry than Cicely had ever known her to be before.

"Cicely, how dare you do such a thing!"

"Miss Primrose, I did not. I did not use the telephone at all. I meant to telephone my grandmother, and then realised I had forgotten the number."

"Nonsense! Do not be so absurd. You cannot expect me to believe such a stupid story."

"She was waiting at the gate," put in Stella, "and I saw her speaking to a reporter."

"I was refusing to say anything to him," said Cicely. "I wouldn't bring the reporters here, Miss Primrose. Goodness knows, I don't want them any more than Mabel does!"

Miss Primrose, however, was unmollified.

"It is useless for you to argue, Cicely. Coupling one thing with another, I can but conclude that all along you have had a deep hatred for Mabel, and have done your best to injure her. I have already expressed my views and wishes, so I need not enlarge upon them now. You will go into the school, and I will consider your punishment. I may ask your grandmother to take you away from Cliff House. In any case, I do not think that I can recommend you as a suitable person to sit for a scholarship."

Cicely, when she heard that, reeled.

"Miss Primrose! You can't mean that!" she cried. "But I—but I thought it was arranged that I should try! Oh, Miss Primrose, it will mean so much to me, so much to grannie, and—and—"

She could not realise that Miss Primrose really meant what she said, and yet the sternness of the headmistress' face showed that she was not merely trying to frighten Cicely, but that she did indeed mean everything that she said.

"There is no room at Cliff House for a girl who acts in such a despicable manner! Go into the school, Cicely!"

Cicely stood her ground. It was the time to fight. If she allowed herself to be wrongfully punished now, defence later would not avail her at all.

"It's all a mistake! It isn't true, Miss Primrose. I did not telephone to the newspaper. I did not spoil Mabel's dresses,"

CHAPTER 20.

Marcia is Not So Clever.

she rushed on hotly. "I don't know how it happened at all—"

Miss Primrose pointed to the School House.

"Cicely, do not defy me. Either you are guilty, or you must prove that some other person or persons spoiled the dresses, and that someone else put through that telephone call in order to let the blame rest on you. And that, of course, is simply incredible."

Cicely raised her head.

"It is just what must have happened—and I'm going to prove it, Miss Primrose!" she said, and turned upon her heel.

Groups of girls were standing about in the quadrangle, and all looked at Cicely as she went from the headmistress' house across to the school. Nor were the looks they gave her friendly.

"Hypocrite!"

"Little humbug!"

Such were the terms she heard referring to herself, and her heart was as heavy as lead. If she could have foreseen that this was to be her lot she would never have come to Cliff House at all. Yet what high hopes she had had on her first day! How she had planned to be happy and be one of "them"!

Barbara Redfern and Mabel Lynn, with their special friends about them, were standing near the school doorway, but as Cicely drew near they turned their backs upon her. Cicely hesitated just for a moment; and then, biting her underlip hard so that she should not cry, she walked on past them.

How low she had fallen! And yet she was not guilty of one charge that they preferred against her! Miss Primrose was right, of course, and the girls thought as she did. If she were not guilty, then she had to prove that someone else was; and until she did she would remain the scape-goat.

But how was she to begin? What chance had she of proving anything so vague? Yet prove it she must, or lose all chance of staying at Cliff House—lose the respect of these girls for ever—yes, and perhaps, too, the respect of her grandmother!

It could not be.

"I must prove it, I must! I'm going to make them like me! I'm going to make them take back all they have said!" she told herself resolutely when, some minutes later, she was alone in the Fourth Form corridor.

CLIFF HOUSE SCHOOL had never been known to occupy itself with one particular incident for very long. There were too many girls there, and too many exciting happenings for one only to have the whole attention of the school for very long.

But although after the arrest of Mr. Lynn, and pending his trial, the matter lost the first flush of its importance, Cicely Jerome was still feeling the effects.

Thanks to the loyalty of her friends, Mabel Lynn was in a quite different position, for the girls who had rallied round Mabel were those who really mattered in the Form—they were the nucleus of the hockey team, the leading spirits of the dramatic society, and the best tennis players; so it was but natural that where they led the others should, sooner or later, follow.

And it happened that all the censure and blame turned now upon Cicely. Cicely, after all, was a new girl, and therefore had not had time to matter very much to anyone. Mabel, on the other hand, was an old and tried friend.

Cicely, refusing to join with Marcia & Co., and being shunned by the others, was left very much to herself.

It was impossible, of course, for her to go into Mabel's study, so that she found that for study companions she had to be content with Marcia Loftus and Gwen Cook, neither of whom did anything to make her feel comfortable or at home.

In other studies there was happiness and fun enough; and Cicely sighed often for friendship. Friendship of a sort she could have had—and had easily—but it was not the sort she wanted. If only she could have joined in with some of Clara's fun, have listened to Jemima's witticisms, or been able to enjoy some of the good-natured chaffing that went on at the expense of Bessie Bunter, she could have been happy.

No suggestion of her unhappiness, however, was ever allowed to creep into her letters to her grandmother, but, of course, she made no pretence about Mabel Lynn. The more she saw of Mabel the better she liked her, and so it was that when she wrote to her grandmother she expressed the hope that the Lynns would not be ruined, and that whatever wrongs Mr. Lynn had done

his family would not be made to suffer. And yet she knew that that was unavoidable.

It was too much to ask that all the people who had suffered through Mr. Lynn should withhold their claims upon him just because of Mabel; yet at times Cicely almost wished that.

Never did she cease to regret her foolishness when she had entered the school, and so openly shunned Mabel. Too late now she saw that that was to blame for all her unhappiness. She had never disliked Mabel—she had never had reason to—but even the hatred of Mr. Lynn that she had visited on the girl who was his daughter vanished now that Mabel was so unhappy.

Mabel, of course, did her very best to hide her feelings; and, being such a good actress, she succeeded. But a day or two after the visit of the reporters, passing Mabel's study, had heard the sound of crying, and pausing just for a fraction had heard Barbara's voice trying to comfort her friend.

Yet outwardly Mabel's was a brave show, and it did much to impress the other girls with her father's innocence.

The arrangements for the concert went on, and Mabel rehearsed her part almost as though nothing had happened.

Sometimes Cicely was able to peep in at rehearsals, for they were not wholly secret. They were held sometimes in the school gymnasium, sometimes in the Common-room, and more often than not in the music-room; and, of course, anyone who wanted to look in did so.

Then, indeed, Cicely's admiration for Mabel would increase; for Mabel was, without doubt, an actress of genius, a girl whose name would one day become famous on the stage. How terrible then to think that her career might be blighted by her father's disgrace!

While the fun went on, Cicely would hide herself away in a corner of the room and watch, trying to convince herself that she was not really apart from all this, but one of the party herself.

The rehearsal was moving well. Bessie Bunter was playing the part of an aged duchess—bad tempered and infirm, but always eating too much. All Bessie had to say was "pass this, please," and then eat whatever was passed to her. Naturally, she was born for the part, and there was no acting required until the time came when one of the things passed to her proved not

to her liking. Then she had to "bring the house down" with her wrath.

"Remember, the third disagrees with you!" whispered Barbara, as she passed Bessie a plate of doughnuts.

There were only three on the plate, and Bessie nodded her head, while the audience, wondering how she would simulate distaste watched eagerly. The fat girl exceeded their wildest hopes, although naturally she did not follow her instructions to the letter. It was the very first one, strange to say, which disagreed with her.

She took no bite at the doughnut, and then threw up her hands.

"Ow, ooh, ah—ooch!" she spluttered, and clasped her mouth.

The audience sat up and took notice. This really was acting. One might almost think that the doughnut actually had disagreed with the fat girl.

"Ooooch—help! Oh dear! Ooch!"

Bessie hopped about as though she were on hot bricks. She knocked over her chair. She bumped into Clara, and sent her staggering. Then, quite suddenly, it became obvious that something was wrong, and girls sprang to their feet.

This was not really good acting on Bessie's part, but natural realism. The doughnut had disagreed with her. Something was wrong.

Jemima Carstairs, who always acted quickly in an emergency, snatched up the doughnut that Bessie had bitten and stared at it.

"Mustard!" she gasped. "Mustard!"

"Oh d-dear, in m-my mouth!" wailed Bessie.

"Someone has put mustard in the doughnut!" cried Clara, in wrath. "I say, what a beastly trick! Poor old Bessie!"

"Water—and bread!" called Barbara; and girls scurried out to bring both, in the hope of giving Bessie relief.

The music-room, where this particular rehearsal was being held, was soon in an uproar, and everyone was asking everyone else who had done it.

Cicely, who had been laughing as much as anyone, suddenly drew back in her corner, as girls looked at her. Why she should be suspected she could not imagine, but that she was suspected quickly became evident.

"There's the girl who did it!" jeered Marcia, pointing at Cicely. "I know it!"

"We both know it!" added Gwen. "She did it, Mabs!"

Mabel Lynn looked at Cicely, and then at the other two. They had appealed to her because she was nearest, and now she said what there was to say.

"I don't believe it!" she said quietly.

"What?" cried Marcia incredulously. "You believe her in preference to us? The girl who's hounding you down—the girl who's telling all sorts of lies about you, who—"

"Oh, dry up, do!" Mabel broke in. "That has nothing to do with this. This is a mean trick on Bessie. I know Cicely fetched the mustard, because I was in the shop, and I know she didn't try to hide what she was buying."

"That's nothing to do with it!" blustered Gwen.

But it was; and Barbara stood by Mabel's decision.

Cicely had turned away, but conscious that Mabel's eyes were upon her, she met them.

"Thank you for believing me, Mabel!" she said; and there was a catch in her voice.

"I wish I could believe about the dresses, and the telephoning, too!" said Mabel; and then, as though surprised at herself for saying it, she turned away.

But Cicely had heard, and her heart leapt. She went out of the room, but she went out with a glad heart—the tears in her eyes brought there by the sudden kindness shown her, and the ray of hope.

When the day of publication of the local paper arrived there was a good deal of excitement in the school. It appeared once a week only, and it had been the day of the publication of the previous issue that the reporters had arrived, so that a full week had elapsed between then and the first opportunity of putting the "interviews" into print.

Miss Primrose had, in the interim, forbidden Cicely and Mabel to talk to any reporter or other person connected with a newspaper. To make quite sure she had gated Cicely for three weeks, leaving Mabel Lynn on trust.

It came as a shock, therefore, after all the headmistress' efforts to ensure that nothing appeared in print, when the newspaper was published containing photographs of the two schoolgirls. And in next

to no time there were at least fifty copies of the paper scattered about the school.

There was not a Form without a paper or two at its disposal; and there was, naturally, considerable excitement when it was discovered that Mabel and Cicely were there on the front page.

The local paper had only recently taken to reproducing photographs, and the process was not perfect. Nevertheless, Mabel could just be recognised, and so could Cicely, and that was all that mattered. Generally the local paper reported only cattle shows, local cricket matches, and the various squabbles in the council chambers. But now it had taken a new line, quite out of accord with its policy. The fact was that the editor was on holiday, and the undergraduate son of the proprietor was taking charge, trying his hand in an amateurish way. The girls did not know that, however.

"FEUD AT SCHOOL.

Girls Fight Parents' Battle.
Cicely Jerome's Story."

It was the last heading of the three which caused girls to sit up and take notice; and although when the papers arrived it was nearly breakfast-time, the whole article was read throughout by anyone who started it—and a strange article it was, too.

Freda Foote had a copy, naturally, and so had Marcia and Gwen; while Jemima Carstairs had procured one to see if there were any cause for Mabel to complain. Her friends were rallying round her with a real will!

Freda took her copy down to the Common-room, where a crowd quickly gathered, dividing up into groups centring about girls who had obtained papers.

"A pretty, vivacious girl of fourteen!" said Freda, reading aloud.

"Oh, really! W-what have they got me in for?" demanded Bessie Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They haven't," said Freda. "No comic supplement."

"But it says 'a pretty, vivacious g-girl of fourteen'! Is there a photograph of me?"

"No fear!" said Freda. "Old ladies with weak hearts read this paper; and, anyway, it's only about ten columns wide

—they'd have to publish your photograph as a serial."

"You m-mean thing!"

"Dry up, Bessie!" came a chorus. "Read on, Freda!"

Freda Footo read on, and there was silence. No one observed Mabel enter the room; no one saw Cicely Jerome creep in just behind her.

"A pretty, vivacious girl of fourteen," read Freda, "'met me'—that's our correspondent—at the gates of the school. She had just returned from the playing fields, where she had been endeavouring to forget her worries. 'Yes,' she said, in response to my inquiry, 'it's quite true. I am Cicely Jerome, and my grandmother has lost all her money. Mr. Lynn persuaded her to invest in some company or other that failed—and now we have practically nothing.' 'Tears welled up in her eyes, and it was easy to see how deeply she had been affected by the selling up of her home, and all her dearest possessions. When I mentioned the name of Mabel Lynn her face hardened, and it was apparent that there was no love lost between the two girls. From the moment of her arrival Cicely has 'cut' the other girl dead, and there has been between them a gulf which nothing could bridge. The sympathy of the others is naturally with Cicely!"

"I say!" exclaimed Freda, lowering the paper. "That's a bit thick, you know!"

"Shame!"

"Read on, Freda!"

Freda selected another portion.

"It has been very hard for Cicely to endure the triumph of the other girl, now richer than ever, while Cicely is almost pauperised."

"Phew! I say!" said Clara. "That's beyond the giddy limit, you know."

"Did you ever?" chimed in Phyllis. "How can any girl make a show of herself like that?"

"I rather fancy it's all wrong," said Jemima Carstairs. "Not allowable while the case is being tried, you know. Scarcely cricket, what? Sub judice, or something, they call it."

"It might prejudice someone who was going to be on the jury," nodded Barbara. "But I suppose the newspaper knows what it can and can't do."

"Yes; and we know what a girl can and

cannot do!" said Clara. "And this is one of the things she can't. Where is Cicely?"

But Cicely had gone. There was no trace of her in the Common-room. Freda read on, but few of the girls were listening now. They had heard enough to satisfy them that Cicely had acted abominably. Much of the report was purely imaginary, and dealt with all manner of things that had never happened; but there was mentioned Cicely's persecution of Mabel, her spoiling of her dresses. And what displeased the girls more than anything was that it was all treated as though it were just what might be expected of "silly schoolgirls." Cicely had let down Cliff House. Cicely had made people think that they were a set of silly, stupid, petty "cats."

"Find Cicely!"

"Where's Cicely?"

"Make her go down on her knees to Mabel!"

"Hear, hear!"

But Cicely was not easy to find. The girls crowded across the hall and up the stairs, then down the stairs and into the hall, gathering girls, snowball fashion, as they went along.

And then Miss Primrose appeared. She silenced the noisy crowd with a curt movement of her hand.

"Cicely Jerome is leaving Cliff House to-morrow—for good!" she said. "For the good of the school. Any girl with a copy of the local paper is to bring it to me at once."

What a buzz there was from the crowd then. Nemesis had overtaken the avenger with surprising speed.

"Expelled!"

Cicely Jerome, who had been at Cliff House such a short while, was now to leave it for ever, in disgrace—expelled!

CHAPTER 21.

Brought to Book.

MISS PRIMROSE, in very angry mood, returned to her room, where she had left Cicely, on hearing the commotion in the hall. When she reached her study she found Cicely by the telephone.

"Cicely!" she cried. "What is the meaning of this? How dare you use the telephone without my permission?"

Cicely turned to Miss Primrose, her face grim, and held out the receiver.

"I have just been telephoning that newspaper, Miss Primrose. The editor is speaking now."

Miss Primrose fairly swept across to the telephone and took up the receiver.

"Hallo! Yes," she said, "I am Miss Primrose, the headmistress of Cliff House School."

Cicely stood by, her heart beating fast. There were tears in her eyes, and yet she did not look cowed, but rather defiant, and her mouth was very firm. It had been on her own initiative that she had rung up the newspaper the moment the headmistress had gone out of the room. For, knowing that she had not given that interview herself, she was determined to find out who had done so.

"Did you get that report direct from the girl Cicely Jerome?" Miss Primrose asked.

"Indirectly. We had it from a Cliff House girl," came the reply.

"But directly from Cicely?"

"Not actually from her lips, of course, but indirectly. I much regret that it occurred, madame; but I have been away on holiday. Naturally, I will do everything in my power to get to the bottom of the matter. The reporters were amateurs, and I assure you that I would never have allowed such a disgraceful thing to go through."

Miss Primrose put back the receiver and looked at Cicely.

"I will go and see the editor directly after breakfast," Miss Primrose said. "This matter must be gone into thoroughly. The editor has apologised; and the report was printed in his absence. Nevertheless, that does not exonerate you. In any case," Miss Primrose ended, "we will interview them after breakfast. You will have your breakfast, and report to me directly afterwards. You understand?"

"Yes, Miss Primrose," said Cicely, quite relieved. "I'm sure I shall be able to prove I had nothing to do with this wicked report."

So sincerely did she speak, and with such honest conviction, that even Miss Primrose seemed suddenly to be shaken from her former certainty. And Cicely had not in any way the air of a girl who had been found out in guilt, or of a girl who acts in defiance. It was difficult to see that there could be any alternative attitude possible to adopt if she were guilty.

Miss Primrose, therefore, looked uncertain in mind as Cicely went so calmly from the room; and Cicely's heart quickened with hope.

It was a moment or so yet to breakfast, and with all possible speed she sought out Marcia Loftus, not finding that girl hard to discover, for Marcia was well to the fore in the Common-room.

Marcia Loftus saw her and stood there defiantly as Cicely approached, little dreaming what line of action that girl was going to take.

There was a crowd of other girls about Marcia, for Marcia had a paper, and was reading extracts from it while others made angry interjections.

"Cicely! The cheek of her coming here—"

Some girls turned their backs; but others, noting how angry Cicely was, stood and stared. Of those latter Mabel Lynn was one, and Barbara Redfern another. Clara Trevlyn had a challenging look, but she stood and stared, too, as did Jemima Carstairs and Marjorie Hazeldene.

Cicely walked straight up to Marcia.

"Marcia," she said, "you're the most hateful girl I know! It's useless for you to pretend any more, because I've just telephoned the editor of that paper; and Miss Primrose and I are going to see him after breakfast."

Marcia Loftus had been quite unprepared for such a direct attack as that. She had faced Cicely coolly, with a mocking sneer on her face; but this directness—well, she was quite off her guard.

"Wh-what do you mean?" she gasped.

"You know what I mean. It's too late now for you to try to draw back. You should have made a better arrangement with the editor if you wanted it kept secret."

"I did. He swore he wouldn't tell. Ho—"

Marcia's hand went up to her face, which suddenly flooded with colour. She looked about her quickly, fearfully, as though hoping against hope that her words had not been heard.

That was far too faint a hope. Every word had been heard distinctly, and every word had been understood.

"Marcia! You!"

"What do you mean, Cicely? What had Marcia to do with it?" cried Mabel Lynn in wonderment.

Cicely pointed to Marcia.

"Look at her face. Doesn't that tell you?" she asked.

Marcia, too late, sought to recover her composure and to turn the attack upon Cicely.

"She's making this up—trying to accuse me. I had nothing to do with it. Why should I? I don't hate Mabel. It's she who hates her. She gave that report—she lied!"

Cicely shrugged her shoulders. The others wore silent, wondering what she would say.

"How can you be so sure what I did?" she asked.

"I—I know you did. I watched you go—"

"When?" asked Cicely. "Where was I going? What proof had you where I was going?"

"I followed you. Gwen knows I did," said Marcia, speaking more evenly. "Ask Gwen. Isn't that true, Gwen?"

"I—I don't know," said Gwen, not wishing to be brought into it. "I had nothing to do with it at all. I was all against it—I mean—"

"She was all against following Cicely, she means!" cut in Marcia with a fierce look at her cowardly ally.

Then Barbara Redfern intervened. "One moment!" she said. "Let's have all this quite clear. You say you followed Cicely to the newspaper office, Marcia?"

"Yes."
"When?"
"The other morning. I—I can't say quite which," said Marcia cunningly.

Mabel Lynn took up the questioning. "You're sure she went inside the office?" she asked.

"Yes, yes! I saw her go inside. Phyllis knows it's true; she saw me cycling out of the gates. And I had a pass to Courtfield for the purpose. Cicely sneaked out without one. You can prove the day—"

Barbara looked at Mabel. Mabel looked at Barbara, and then they both looked at Jemima Carstairs, who was polishing her monocle.

"Rather good, what?" said Jemima. "It proves beyond all doubt that dear Marcia knows where the newspaper office is, and was actually at the door. We can find the morning, and it remains to prove where Cicely was. At least we know that on that morning Marcia was at the newspaper office."

Marcia changed colour. She began to

see that she was getting into rather deep water. She had confessed that she had been dangerously near the newspaper office on that morning, but it was yet to be proved that Cicely had even so much as left the school.

"I don't see that there's any need to argue. I've telephoned the editor," said Cicely.

She did not say that he had mentioned Marcia's name, but Marcia's guilty conscience had caused her mind to leap at that conjecture.

"It's a lie! He didn't give me away—he didn't," floundered Marcia, "say I'd followed you, that is! I—I went in and asked him if—if you had been in—"

Cicely smiled.
"And you didn't mention this to anyone when you came back! You didn't tell a single girl that I had been to the newspaper office, of course! You kept it to yourself until now!"

"Bit steep," said Jemima, shaking her head. "Think of a better one."

The temper of the crowd had changed. It was now intent, but it was not hostile to Cicely, although it was beginning to treat Marcia derisively.

"It looks as though Marcia will be expelled instead of Cicely," said Mabel, "if Miss Primrose knows this."

"She doesn't," Cicely said quickly. "I shan't tell her that Marcia was responsible—I shan't, that is, on one condition."

Marcia Loftus clenched and unclenched her hands. She had thought she was safe, that Cicely would be accused, and that the newspaper people would not divulge her name. But now—well, surely there was expulsion ahead of her.

"I won't tell Miss Primrose, on one condition," repeated Cicely. "That condition is that you or Gwen tells the truth about the dresses in the dormitory."

Marcia licked her lips; and then a hard glitter came into her eyes.

"Right! I'll do that," she said. "The fact is, Gwen and I went into the dormitory, and Gwen wanted to try on one of Mabel's dresses."

"It was not me!" said Gwen furiously. "Don't listen to her! It was Marcia; not me. She suggested it—"

"It was you!" screamed Marcia. "You know it was! You spilt the ink! You took the ink out of the case—"

"It wouldn't have spilled if you hadn't struggled—"

They shouted in fury at each other, and Mabel Lynn put her fingers to her ears.

Cicely laughed. The sight of those two allies quarrelling so angrily and cattily was too much. Together they had stood, divided they had fallen.

"Anyway, I had nothing to do with the paper. I was all against it!" fumed Gwen. "If you want to know the truth about that you can have it. Marcia went to the newspaper office—"

"No, I didn't!"

"She did! And she told them all that rignarole," said Gwen spitefully. "I had nothing to do with it at all."

Barbara Redfern stopped between them as they faced one another, glaring. Barbara's face was white with anger, and her eyes gleamed.

"You're a disgrace to Cliff House, both of you! You ought to be reported to Miss Primrose. How any girl could let another suffer as you have let Cicely I do not know—when you were guilty all the time!"

Cicely walked to the door, but Mabel Lynn rushed across the room and intercepted her.

"Cicely, don't go! I want to say I'm sorry! Please—please won't you shake hands? This time?"

She held out her hand; and Cicely looked at her for a moment coldly, and then smiled. Next moment her hand was in Mabel's. Next moment she was hugging her.

"Oh, Mabel, I'm so glad!" she whispered huskily. "So glad you know the truth now! I don't hate you a bit; I—I— It's quite the opposite! And I hope it isn't true about your father. I hope I can do something to—save him."

"Well said, Cicely!"

The girls crowded round, and now there were apologies by the dozen, and handshakings and pattings on the back. Thoroughly ashamed that they had for so long blamed her unjustly, the girls wanted to do all they could to make good.

Cicely laughed and cried alternately with happiness.

"As long as you don't think all those horrid things about me any longer; what has happened—well, has happened. We can start again."

And so it was that she went down to breakfast between Barbara Redfern and Mabel Lynn—arm-in-arm.

CHAPTER 22.

New Evidence.

IT was only a few moments after breakfast that someone tapped at the door of Miss Primrose's study, and the headmistress, putting her papers in order before the journey to Courtfield, gave a stern "Come in!" expecting the entrant to be Cicely Jerome.

The girl who entered was Marcia Loftus. "Well, Marcia, I am busy. What is it?" said Miss Primrose, who was never very pleased to see the sneak of the Fourth.

Marcia looked very pale of face and agitated, and she came cringing into the room.

"Oh, M-Miss Primrose," she stammered, "I've come to make a confession!"

Miss Primrose started. It leapt into her mind at once that there was some connection between Marcia's manner and statement and the miserable affair of the newspaper report.

"A confession? What about?" she asked sternly.

Marcia looked down at the carpet, a cunning look in her eyes. But she simulated tears, dabbing at her eyes and shifting from one foot to the other.

"Yes, Miss Primrose. I—I have heard that Cicely is to be expelled for—for sending that report to the paper."

"That is so," said Miss Primrose, regarding the wretched girl sternly. "Why has that brought you here?"

"I—I can't bear to think of her being expelled. I—I don't want another girl to suffer for—for my silly joke."

"Joke? Marcia, what do you mean? Out with it, girl!"

"Oh, Miss Primrose, please don't be angry! I—I know it was silly of me; but I was tempted by the reporters, you see, and I didn't know it would be so serious for Cicely. If I had known she might be expelled— But I didn't. But now—now I have come to confess."

Miss Primrose sat down heavily in her chair.

"Marcia," she said, after the pause necessary to assimilate that information, "I—I must confess that I am at a loss for words."

"The reporters practically made me do it—really, they did, Miss Primrose! I couldn't help myself. I'm sorry! I'm so dreadfully sorry—really, I am! I don't want to let Cicely suffer for—for what I did."

It was disconcerting to her that Miss Primrose did not interrupt. Marcia had hoped that she would be applauded as a noble girl for taking the blame when she might let it fall upon Cicely. But, of course, Miss Primrose knew Marcia as of old, and now she looked the Fourth-Former up and down measuringly.

"You came to confess, in the hope of saving Cicely from being expelled?"

"Yes, Miss Primrose!" Marcia cried, looking up. "That's exactly it."

"You realise that you may be expelled in her place?"

"I—I—" Marcia dropped her jaw. She had hoped that her confession would make a heroine of her; but she saw only stern condemnation in Miss Primrose's face. Marcia's cunning always became more acute when she was desperate, and it did not now desert her. "Oh, yes! But I had to risk that. My conscience is—" she managed to say.

Miss Primrose, silent for a while, spoke at last.

"Very well, I must accept that, Marcia. I am glad indeed to discover that you have a conscience, and that it has prompted you to save another from wrongful pain. It would," she added with a touch of sarcasm that made even Marcia wince—"it would be painful for me to feel that you confessed merely to anticipate your being found out, and in the hope of being spared punishment. I will, therefore, take the kinder view, and suppose that what you say is correct, and that nothing but the very best motives prompted your visit to me. In which case, you will be gated for a month, and will write out five hundred lines. Another time I—well, let us trust there will be no other time. You may go."

Marcia crept from the study and sighed in relief. Her punishment was anything but a light one, since it would rob her of all her spare time for weeks to come. But at least she had escaped expulsion; and she hoped she had cut a fine figure in Miss Primrose's eyes. She was not, however, too sure about that.

Cicely was standing in the hall, and could not conceal her amazement when she saw Marcia emerge from Miss Primrose's study. Her first thought was that there had been further treachery, but when she saw Marcia's face that look went.

"I've owned up," said Marcia sullenly,

"because I don't want any other girl to suffer for what I may have done."

Having said that, she walked on, leaving Cicely to stare after her in a state of greater wonderment than before. That Marcia should do such a thing as that seemed utterly incredible, and Cicely puckered her brow in a perplexed frown. But there was something in Marcia's manner—a suggestion of boast when she had made her remark—that really gave some semblance of truth to it.

Any doubts Cicely had were quickly banished when Miss Primrose came to the door of her study and called to her. The headmistress' tone was kindly, and there was completely lacking the sternness which had been so noticeable before breakfast.

Indeed, Miss Primrose was almost apologetic when she addressed Cicely.

"Marcia has made a most extraordinary confession, Cicely," she said. "And I fear you have been misjudged. It appears that it was Marcia who caused that wretched report to be inserted in the paper, although she says that she did so under persuasion."

Cicely's face lit up, and she could not repress a smile.

"Oh, Miss Primrose, then you are not going to expel me now?"

"In the circumstances, no, Cicely. I have misjudged you, and I shall take the earliest opportunity of letting the whole school know the truth."

"And may I make the paper contradict it all, and make them put in a true report—that Mabel and I are now the best of friends?"

Miss Primrose looked more than surprised.

"You are now the best of friends? But, really—"

"Yes, yes, Miss Primrose! Mabel knows now that it was not I who ruined her dresses; and I want to do all I can to help her father. There must be some mistake."

Miss Primrose put a hand on Cicely's shoulder, and there was a kindly and admiring look in her eyes.

"I cannot say how glad I am, Cicely, that it has all ended in this way. I, too, wish that Mabel's father could clear his name, as I feel sure that there is some dreadful mistake somewhere. But the matter is completely out of our hands, and we can do nothing but hope for the best."

"I'm afraid there is nothing," sighed Cicely. "But I feel so guilty about it all,

Miss Primrose. I feel that it was my fault that Mr. Lynn was arrested—my fault and grannie's—but—"

Cicely turned then, hearing a commotion; and Miss Primrose hurried down the corridor to the Hall, where girls were crowding with evident signs of excitement.

"Mabel! Where's Mabel?"

"Anyone seen Mabel? Her father wants her on the 'phone!"

Cicely followed Miss Primrose into the Hall, and the headmistress went at once to the monitor's room, where the call for Mabel Lynn had been received. Mabel was not to be found at the moment; for she was in the school gymnasium, trying to persuade fat Bessie Bunter to perform on the horizontal bar.

Miss Primrose, in Mabel's absence, went to the telephone; and Cicely stood by at the door, with a crowd of girls around her.

"Yes, Mr. Lynn," Miss Primrose was saying, "they are looking for Mabel now. Is there any message that I can give her?"

There was a pause while Mr. Lynn was speaking, and the girls held their breath in excitement.

"Something thrilling!" whispered Freda Foote, who never could keep silent for more than a minute. "I distinctly heard him say squeakety-squeak-squawk—"

That was how the distant voice sounded to the girls standing so far from the receiver; and there was a soft chuckle, which died away when Connie Jackson frowned at them all.

"Yes, Mr. Lynn, I will do that. Cicely is here now."

Cicely!

Everyone turned to look at that girl at once, and everyone quite wrongly thought that Mr. Lynn had read that report in the paper, and was telephoning a complaint. But the error was quickly learned.

"Cicely," said Miss Primrose, turning from the telephone, "have you any knowledge of a blue envelope containing some shares connected with an oil company?"

Cicely gave a little jump of surprise.

"A blue envelope? Yes, Miss Primrose. Grannie was sold some shares in some new oilfields, or something, and they're worthless."

"Mr. Lynn suggests that they are not. But that remains yet to be proved. In that envelope there was placed by mistake a most important letter. If that can be found it is practically certain that the case

against Mr. Lynn will collapse, because that letter proves that he was acting honestly, and in full belief that the shares he was selling were worth a great deal of money."

There was a hush amongst the crowd—a most excited hush—while Cicely stood quite still.

"I know it—that envelope!" she gasped. "Oh, but where is it? Surely grannie has it?"

"No; Mr. Lynn wonders if you have it, by any chance. Your grandmother, believing it worthless, did not bring it from the house. She suggested that you might have it."

"I? Oh, no!"

And then Mabel Lynn, greatly excited, came on to the scene with a host of other girls, and quickly the situation was explained to her.

"Cicely, you haven't it?" she asked.

"No, no! I'm sure I haven't. But I'll look. I don't see why it should be in my things. But I can look."

"Oh, if you would!" pleaded Mabel.

"Of course—at once! Come and help me," suggested Cicely eagerly, and yet only too conscious that it was highly improbable they would meet with any reward for their searching. "More likely," she sighed, "it is left at the house in the old lumber-room with things the gardener had been told to burn."

"To—to burn?" cried Mabel, aghast.

"Oh!" And all the colour drained from her cheeks.

"Then it'll be too late!" gasped Barbara.

"Oh, my goodness! If only it had been known before!"

"You search my things!" said Cicely briskly. "I'll see if I can be allowed to go home."

They were on the staircase, with Miss Primrose just behind them, and the headmistress heard that last remark.

"If the papers cannot be found, you must go home, of course, Cicely. It is not so far by road as by train, and I can drive you there. Anything we can do we must do it if it is to clear Mr. Lynn's name."

The search was really frantic; things were pulled out of Cicely's trunks and cases, and everything flung about. But, although photographs of her home and of her pets came to light, there was no blue envelope.

Miss Primrose, convinced now that the

papers were not at the school, made up her mind that the only thing to do was to take the two girls to Cicely's old home, in the hope that the papers would not yet have been burned.

Cliff House simply seethed with excitement; and when the bell rang for lessons it was as much as mistresses could do to get the girls into the class-rooms—and that was not possible except at the expense of lines.

Some moments before order was restored and lessons begun, Miss Primrose, accompanied by Cicely and Mabel, was driven out of the school gates, taking the last desperate chance to save Mr. Lynn.

CHAPTER 23.

The Reward of Her Bravery.

“NOW left, Miss Primrose; along here; and there are the gates

They had been nearly three hours on the road, when at last they reached the lodge gates of Cicely's old home. There were no new occupants yet, and the gates were wide, the grounds deserted and showing signs of neglect.

Miss Primrose drove up the drive through the avenue of trees, as directed, until finally they drew up outside a magnificent Georgian house, now solemnly quiet and deserted.

To Cicely the memories of the place were poignant, bringing tears to her eyes when she remembered how it had always looked. She thought she could picture curtains at the windows, and a window open, with her grandmother sitting there reading; a dog out on the broad, smooth lawn, and her pony in the paddock beyond. But all was silent.

Round at the back there were signs of decorators' men at work; there were ladders and other paraphernalia suggestive of industry, but the men were having lunch in a field near by.

“The boxes,” said Cicely excitedly, “were in that top room. There are heaps of old books and things we didn't want—all left up there. But the house is locked up.”

“We must find one of the workmen. I think I can hear them,” said Miss Primrose.

She went across to one of the fields; and Cicely and Mabel exchanged glances.

There was a ladder running up against

the side of the house, and a window open near to it.

“Shall I?” asked Cicely.

“It's risky!” objected Mabel. “And the men will be here in a moment, you know.”

But Cicely decided to take the risk, and she mounted the ladder cautiously, while Mabel, looking anxious, waited at the bottom. When she was half-way up, however, Cicely stopped and sniffed the air.

“What is it?” asked Mabel, suddenly conscious by the other's expression that something was amiss.

“Fire!” returned Cicely, sniffing again. “I can smell something burning—”

“The men have been burning off the old paint with blowlamps, that's all,” Mabel suggested.

“No, no! Ah, look!” cried Cicely in horror.

From one of the windows above came a curl of black smoke and a redness that told of flames within. A room was alight.

“Fire!” shrieked Mabel.

Cicely mounted the ladder more quickly and hauled herself in through a window. Come what might, she must obtain the evidence that would clear Mr. Lynn.

Mabel Lynn, down below, called frantically for help, and then went up the ladder in pursuit of Cicely.

But before she was even half-way up Miss Primrose returned in great haste, accompanied by three of the workmen.

“Mabel! Mabel!” she cried urgently. “Come back!”

“But Cicely's inside. The house is on fire, Miss Primrose!”

“Come back at once! Cicely should not have gone! Oh, gracious! Look at the blaze!”

The fire had reached the window of one of the rooms, and now the smoke curled out ominously, and there came the sound of crackling wood.

The workmen busied themselves at once. The house was opened, and they ran inside, with pails of sand and water, to fight the conflagration.

Cicely, meanwhile, was inside the house, and, knowing her way, went at once to the room where the fire was. The roar of it was deafening, and it was with dread that she approached it along the corridor.

It was the lumber-room, the room where some old painting equipment of her father's had been stored—palettes, paints, and

bottles of mysterious mixtures, and paraffin. No wonder it was so well alight!

Plucking up courage, she opened the door of the room; and then staggered back, as black smoke wraithed out upon her, and the great orange flames leapt out to scorch her face. Then, terrified lest the open door might spread the fire, she pulled it shut.

"Help! Upstairs in the lumber-room!" she called, as she heard the approaching workmen.

"Right, miss—right!"

The burly men soon took the matter in hand; and Cicely went frantically into the next room, where all the papers and books were. That room was already foggy with smoke, and on the floor she saw a trail of paraffin oil.

"It's that fellow we saw hanging about here!" she heard one of the workmen say. "I was sure he came into the place!"

"Set it alight, he did!"

Cicely stared wildly about her in the second lumber-room. Papers and books of all sorts were littered about on the floor, some of them covered with paraffin. If the fire reached that room everything would be ablaze in a moment. And it was in that room that the blue envelope was most likely to be!

Cicely stood quite still for a moment. To go or to stay? If she went the papers would never be found; if she stayed—was there not terrible risk of her being suffocated?

But that hesitation was but brief. Dipping her handkerchief in one of the pails of water brought by the workmen, she tied it round her mouth, and returned to the second lumber-room.

In a moment she was on the floor, groveling amongst the papers, pushing them aside, casting them here and there, as she dug, like a rabbit-hunting terrier, for the precious blue envelope.

"I must find it—I must!" was her agonised thought.

Every moment the smoke became denser. Her eyes watered; she could hardly see in front of her. The hiss of the water thrown on to the flame was frightening, the roar rose like thunder. It was like a log fire with paraffin thrown on to it, but magnified a thousand times! And the heat!

And then—then before her she saw the blue envelope—saw it lit up by the glare of the flames that had now spread on to the ceiling of this room! Her fingers snatched

at the envelope and clasped it just as she heard, as though from a great distance, Mabel's voice frantically calling.

"Cicely! Cicely! Where are you? Oh, where are you, Cicely?"

With all the remaining power of her lungs, Cicely shrieked one word:

"Here!"

And then everything became black, as she dropped amongst the papers on the floor, her hand clutching, as though in a vice, the blue envelope!

When Cicely opened her eyes, it was to find herself on the grass outside the house. Mabel Lynn was kneeling beside her, tears streaming down her face, while Miss Primrose, red from the exertion of bringing her round, was looking worn out.

"Oh, thank goodness! Thank goodness she's alive!" Mabel cried, and dropped her head on to Cicely's cheek, sobbing with pent-up emotion and indescribable relief, while Cicely's arm encircled her neck.

Outside the house was the fire-engine, which had been hastily summoned, and the fire was being surely, if slowly, mastered.

"Oh, Cicely, why did you stay? You might have been killed!" Mabel cried.

"You foolish, brave girl!" whispered Miss Primrose. "We have been distracted!"

Cicely managed a smile.

"I got the envelope! Is the letter there?" she asked.

"Yes, yes, it is here!" Miss Primrose replied. "But it was not worth risking your life."

"It was! Oh, it was! It was worth anything to—prove," said Cicely, speaking with an effort—"to prove I'm sorry I was ever such a pig to Mabel."

The hug that Mabel gave her showed that all the proof necessary had been given, and for a while the two of them remained there, while Miss Primrose interviewed the fire brigade captain and elicited the information that the fire was "under."

The ride home was the most exciting they had known; for at the first town they telephoned to Mr. Lynn, telling him that the letter had been rescued. Mr. Lynn had expressed his delight and his admiration for Cicely.

"The share certificates are safe?" he asked anxiously.

"Yes, daddy. But aren't they—well, aren't they—" said Mabel, not liking to use the word "worthless."

"Worthless? No, my child! They're worth ten times what they were bought for. I have just had a cable to say that oil is simply gushing, and so Cicely's fortune is more than recouped."

"Daddy, daddy, is that really true?" cried Mabel.

"Yes, absolutely true! It's in the papers. Naturally, I am saved now. The people who thought of getting rid of worthless shares will find themselves immensely rich. So there's no need to worry at all."

Mabel told that to Cicely; and then Cicely, clutching the transmitter, made stumbling, halting, but sincere apologies for ever having thought wrongly of Mr. Lynn.

But none of that mattered now. All was well. Mr. Lynn had no stain upon his character. Cicely's fortune was regained. And all the way home the girls babbled with excitement and sang, and really would have danced if that had been possible in the car. Miss Primrose, because she understood so well how they felt, said not a word of criticism.

Naturally, after that, Cicely was the heroine of the hour at Cliff House School, and she arranged that a party should be given in honour of the happy ending to what might have been an overwhelming tragedy.

Marjorie Hazeldene resigned from the play, saying she had other things she simply had to do; so, of course, Cicely was offered her part, and accepted it with great enthusiasm.

The banquet was to take place following the performance of their play in the village, and the days that preceded it were packed with excitement and fun.

Marcia Loftus and Gwen Cook were not taking part. The Fourth Form saw to that. Those two girls were almost completely

ignored during the days that preceded the concert, and they felt very sorry for themselves indeed.

Connie Jackson once or twice tried to be unpleasant, but perhaps her conscience touched her; certainly she never liked catching Cicely's eye, and it came to be quite a joke in the Fourth whenever Connie was about to urge Cicely to "give her a look." For, while there was no proof that it had been Connie who had originally given the newspaper information, there was excellent ground for suspicion.

But Connie stayed at school when the great majority went to the concert, so she knew nothing of Mabel's tremendous ovation, and of her success, which brought delight to all her friends, and especially to Cicely Jerome.

And the banquet—the success of that had been a foregone conclusion, and there was enough to satisfy even Bessie Bunter; while Freda Foote's speech was a triumph; and Jemima's reply to it was as witty as anyone could wish.

The toast of the evening, however, was given by Barbara to Mabel Lynn and Cicely Jerome, once divided by a feud and now friends.

"And may nothing ever happen again to mar their 'friendship!'" concluded Barbara. "Here's to the buried hatchet which no one is ever going to dig up again!"

To which there came in response a "Hear, hear!" that was almost deafening.

Up jumped Clara.

"And may Cicely forgive us for ever thinking that she was anything but a ripping, good sort," she cried. "and a girl we're proud to have in the Form!"

At which emotion choked Cicely so that she could only stammer her thanks and raise her glass to them all—the happiest girl at Cliff House!

THE END.

FOUR MORE
SPLENDID NUMBERS

NEXT MONTH

PRICE
FOURPENCE EACH

NO. 300. TO SCHOOL ON PROBATION.

By LOUISE CARLTON.

NO. 301. AT SCHOOL TO KEEP HER SILENT.

By ENID FARLE.

NO. 302. PUTTING THINGS RIGHT FOR TRIXIE.

By HILARY MARLOW.

NO. 303. FOR CIRCUS FAME AND FORTUNE.

By GLADYS COTTERILL.

WHY NOT A WALKING HOLIDAY?

Why not, indeed? For what pleasanter way of spending a holiday could be imagined than walking or rambling across the countryside, either in this country or abroad? Certain it is that there are fewer more enjoyable or more health-giving holidays.

In the first place, walking is a splendid exercise; to walk briskly until you are pleasantly tired is a delight, as many of you who belong to the Girl Guides well know. On a walking holiday, too, you have more opportunities of seeing things of interest; you can stay as long as you like at any place, or move on whenever you feel inclined.

Naturally, the summer is the season for a holiday of this sort, as the weather plays a very important part in the programme. If your walking holiday is to occupy only a day or two you will not have any preparations to make, beyond planning your route.

If, however, you succeed in collecting a number of friends for a walking holiday of two or three weeks' duration you will have quite a lot of preparations to make. And such jolly preparations, too!

The first essential is to map out the route you propose to follow. Choose the centre from which you intend to start, and mark the course on a large-scale map. If you are going with a number of other girls you will find it better and more interesting to avoid all main roads, making use of only lanes and footpaths. Main roads are usually very uninteresting to walkers, and are frequently crowded with traffic. Tired roads, too, tire the feet very quickly.

Don't attempt too much at first. Don't attempt to "break all records," and thus spoil your holiday by hurrying and over-tiring yourself. You will derive ever so much more pleasure from a shorter walk than from a long, tiring tramp. Eight or ten miles a day is ample, to begin with, though of course you will find that towards the end of your holiday you can walk farther without tiring.

The charm of a walking holiday lies in its freedom from routine, and so it is just as well not to make too many plans

beforehand. Remember that unexpected pleasures are often more delightful than those to which you have been looking forward for a long time.

Of course, it isn't absolutely necessary to walk all the time. To jump on a bus, or to board a train, in order to carry one over country which may not be very interesting, is quite permissible. Indeed, it rather adds to the delights and surprises of the holiday.

Planning a walking holiday is almost as good fun as the holiday itself. You must have a large-scale map, marked with footpaths and lanes, and you will be amazed at the enjoyment derived from studying it. Few things are more fascinating than a good map, especially when one is planning how to spend a holiday.

If you intend going for a long walking tour it will be necessary to have suitable clothes and footwear for the occasion. Walking is a warm pastime, especially in the summer, so you will only need light garments. Be sure to include a strong mackintosh in your equipment. You will need stout shoes, and socks, worn over your stockings are a great comfort. A broad-brimmed hat is advisable on a walking holiday, as it protects one's head and neck from the sun.

It is advisable to take a walking-stick; you will find it a great help when you are nearing the end of a long day's walk. All your personal belongings can be carried in a haversack, slung over your shoulders in Girl Guide fashion.

The best times for walking are the morning and evening, so you will be well advised to do the greater part of your tramping at these times. It is better to rest in the middle of the day, when the sun is hot and one feels naturally tired.

Don't forget to keep a diary or notebook of your walking holiday. It will add greatly to the interest of the tour, and in after years will remind you of many happy hours.

A camera, too, is a delightful asset to a walking holiday. You will find numberless subjects for jolly snaps.

So when next you are planning a summer holiday, consider a walking tour.

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