

THEIR SECRET QUARREL AT SCHOOL.

BY
HILDA RICHARDS

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**THE MODERN PAPER FOR THE MODERN
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Their Secret Quarrel at School!

A Splendid Story of the Merry Chums of the Fourth Form at Cliff House School.

By **HILDA RICHARDS.**

Author of "THEIR FEUD AT SCHOOL," "ON TRIAL AT SCHOOL," "WHEN CLIFF HOUSE BLUNDERED," etc., etc.

CHAPTER 1.

Eleanor Lawton's Vanity.

"NO lessons—hurrah!"
Barbara Redfern, the captain of the Fourth Form at Cliff House School, looked round the crowded Common-room with shining eyes.

"I should think not," said tomboy Clara Trevlyn. "As if we could do any giddy lessons when there's the school dance this evening."

"Hear, hear!"

But although there was a general chorus of approval, it had come as a surprise to most of the Cliff House girls when Miss Primrose, the headmistress of the school, had announced that there would be no afternoon lessons. Who would have guessed it? Not only was there the joy of the school dance, which was to take place that evening, but also no afternoon lessons. Cheers!

Clara Trevlyn was perched on the back of an armchair in which Marjorie Hazeldene sat altering a dance frock. Barbara Redfern, for all that she had only just entered the room, was discussing a very important matter with her friend, Mabel Lynn, in front of the fire. That matter concerned a dance frock, naturally. It would, in fact, have been a safe guess that practically every girl in the room was discussing dance frocks, dancing, and hair-dressing.

What a babel—what a chatter! But then a school dance was a rare and a very precious event, the chief topic of conversation days and days before, as well as afterwards. They were all doing or saying something.

There was Augusta Anstruther-Browne, showing some new dance steps to Jemima Carstairs, who was pretending to be completely dazed by them, and tying herself into purposeful knots which annoyed

Augusta, a rather dignified girl; but it amused the onlookers exceedingly.

"Now the left—no, no, no, the left!" said Augusta, in exasperation.

"Sorry—sorry!" apologised Jemima. "Start again. This is my left foot, what?"

"Yes, of course."

"You're sure?" said Jemima, polishing her monocle and looking very serious.

"Of course I'm sure!" snapped Augusta.

"Really, one might imagine you were trying not to learn, Jemima. It's simple enough. Look—"

Augusta was really a very good dancer indeed, and extremely graceful. What is more, she was quite well aware of the fact herself, and liked nothing better than showing off to the other girls gathered round.

But it was most unfortunate that Freda Foote, the humorist of the Form, happened to be present. Freda, with a face as grave as an owl's, rucked the rug slightly, as Augusta, dancing lightly and gracefully, reached it.

Augusta, of course, was unprepared for that. While the others watched with bated breath, she caught her foot in the ruck, staggered, and then, to the accompaniment of gasps, collapsed on to the floor in a heap.

"I see," said Jemima. "Looks quite easy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Freda, repenting perhaps for her little trick, picked Augusta up; but what titters of laughter there were!

Augusta turned away haughtily, and turned with such haste that she nearly banged into another girl who was just entering the room.

That girl had a flushed face that matched Augusta's. It was pride, and not humiliation, that brought colour to her cheeks, and the sparkle to her eyes, however.

At sight of her, the laughter died away, and it was she who became the centre of attraction in place of Augusta. Every girl in the room was looking at her.

But it was not to be wondered at; for the girl wore a new dance frock—and such a frock! Admiration and envy seemed to fight for mastery in the looks that the others gave that frock. It really was magnificent.

"Well, it's arrived," said the girl. "How do you like it, girls?"

Then she paraded like a peacock awaiting admiration.

Eleanor Lawton had been at Cliff House only one term, but already she had made her mark. She had, in that short time, earned for herself a reputation for vanity, extravagance, and pettiness. All three qualities now seemed combined in her as she stood in the Common-room showing off her new frock.

"Splendid!" said Barbara Redfern, in her candid way. "I think it's awfully pretty, Eleanor."

"Hear, hear!" said Marjorie Hazeldene.

"Well, it ought to be," said Eleanor, with a smug laugh. "Considering what I paid for it. You'd never guess how much."

"As much as that, what?" said Jemima.

"Well, it's decidedly swish, as one might say."

"Rather!" agreed Clara Trevlyn.

Eleanor, hand on hip affectedly, twiddled and twirled so that nothing of the frock's beauty should be missed. Yet there was a silence. However much admiration the girls felt they did not go into ecstasies. It was not that they were jealous, but that they could not bring themselves to play up to this girl's inordinate vanity and conceit.

"Same colour as mine," commented Mabel Lynn.

Eleanor bridled at once. The idea that anyone could have anything at all resembling hers! Her small nose was turned up loftily, and she gave Mabel a contemptuous look.

"What, that horrid old thing of yours—this colour!" she said. "Nonsense! It's several shades different."

Mabel Lynn went rather red, and there came a soft murmur from the other girls.

"I was referring to my new frock," said Mabel, "which you haven't seen."

"Are you having a new frock for the dance?" asked Eleanor, and such was her tone that really it might have been an offence directed against her for any other girl to have a new frock.

"Yes, of course I am."

"And I," put in Barbara. "And most of us, Eleanor."

"I say, may I take a photo of you like that?" asked Freda Foote, with great eagerness.

Eleanor, of course, could never see when she was being laughed at, and although the others knew perfectly well that Freda was teasing, she took it quite seriously.

"Yes," she nodded. "But the light isn't good enough. Besides, you might not

get the full effect. I think I'll have it done in Friardale, and send one to my mother."

She turned then and founced out of the room, leaving an uncomfortable silence behind her.

Most girls like to show their frocks to their friends; most girls like to have remarks passed about them, for that was only natural. But Eleanor went beyond the limit. She aired her riches and her extravagance. She flaunted her wealth in the face of poorer girls. And that was not to be forgiven her.

"That girl!" said Barbara in disgust. "I sometimes wish I could be as rude to her as you are, Freda."

"It's what she needs," agreed Clara Trevlyn grimly. "I dare say she's gone now to show that frock to Sheila—knowing that Sheila's as poor as a church mouse, and can't afford a new frock."

Clara was right. That was just what Eleanor intended to do. It seemed to Eleanor a very fine piece of luck that she and Sheila Wynn had been placed in the same study. For Sheila was as poor as Eleanor was rich; and what a fine chance that gave her for airing her wealth!

Clara was right, too, when she said that Sheila could not afford a new frock for the dance. How long was it since Sheila had had a new frock? So long that even Sheila could not accurately remember.

Eleanor had gone upstairs, humming gaily to herself, and turned into the Fourth Form corridor. Outside the door that bore a little brass number—11—she halted placed her hand on the knob, and then hesitated, for from inside the study there came a soft sound—almost as though someone were crying. Someone crying in the study? Whom could it be but Sheila Wynn?

Eleanor, instead of feeling compassion, uttered a little cross exclamation. If Sheila was crying she would not be in a mood to admire a frock. That was her only reflection. Not one thought, of course, did Eleanor give to the cause of the other's tears. That did not worry her at all.

"Bothr!" she muttered, for she had particularly wanted to impress Sheila. Sheila was a girl who was never jealous at all, or spiteful. If a frock was pretty, she used to say so. If Eleanor looked nice—well, she admitted the fact honestly. That was Sheila all over.

Eleanor tapped at the study door—just to give Sheila time to dry her eyes. She knew her study companion well enough to realise that Sheila would not want to be found crying. Sheila was as proud as ten other girls, perhaps because she was so poor.

"Oh—c-come in!" came a startled voice. Eleanor pushed open the door, and did not at once look at Sheila; but out of the corner of her eye she saw that Sheila was dabbing her eyes. How red they looked! And yet Sheila was ordinarily a pretty girl.

"Oh," said Sheila. "You? I thought it was someone else who knocked."

Then Eleanor turned to her radiantly. "I thought I'd give you a little treat," she said. "Not often you get the chance to see a really pretty frock like this, I dare say. Look—isn't it sweet? And just look at this embroidery. If only you knew what it cost!"

Sheila dabbed at her eyes and fought hard to smile.

"It—it's very pretty," she said. "And yet how tonless her voice was!"

"Pretty! I should say so. Why, it's a model. Not another like it anywhere. And doesn't it suit me? See how it seems to make my hair sparkle! And these stockings—don't they match well?"

Of course she saw that Sheila had been mending a stocking, and how hurriedly that stocking was pushed away. Ugh! A cheap stocking—horrible! That was all Eleanor thought as she looked down at her own leg, sheathed in a stocking that had been sent especially down from London. Two guineas a pair!

It was like Eleanor to give the impression that she had bought them herself, but it had been her mother who had paid for them.

"Wonderful!" said Sheila, and touched the stocking with the tips of her fingers. "How—how splendid, Eleanor!"

Sheila's hair was brown, yet against the soft skin of her cheeks it seemed to have all the colours in the world; wonderful gleaming lights were there, and it was silky soft. Her complexion was like a delicate peach, and when she looked up with those large eyes of hers no stranger could have noticed what it was she wore—shabby or threadbare, ill-cut or ill-fitting.

Yet it was Sheila's shabby drill-dress that Eleanor looked at, and her lips parted in a slight curl of amusement and contempt.

"And what are you wearing?" she said, not because she was interested, but just to feel superior and to know that Sheila would be gratefully humble.

"I? Oh, I'm having my evening frock cleaned!" said Sheila. "I dare say it will be all right. And—and I'm having it altered a little."

"Oh, my dear!" said Eleanor in her affected way, patting her hair. "Not that silly old green taffeta! Why, everyone knows that by heart. You simply can't, my dear! Really! Why didn't you get a new one?"

What a weary sigh Sheila gave!

"Because I can't afford to—or mother can't. I haven't any money."

Eleanor smiled in a most superior manner. What an admission for anyone to make, she was thinking.

"Oh, but a new frock," she said, with a short laugh, "what does that cost? You could get a cheap little thing for ten pounds."

"If I could get a cheap little thing for two, I'd have it," said Sheila, and even she could not keep just the faintest trace of bitterness from her voice. What an effort she made then to pull herself together! "Still, I shall like that frock when it has been cleaned and—and trimmed up. Anyway, it's like an old friend. I'm so used to it. You know, I don't believe I could part with it." Just like Sheila to try to make the best of things!

"Poor you," said Eleanor. "How terrible to be as poor as that!" And she shuddered affectedly. "Didn't your father leave you any money? He was killed in the War, wasn't he—or something?"

"Or something," said Sheila, and her hands clenched. She turned away, hating Eleanor for that casual remark, but not wishing to lose control of her temper. "My daddy was reported missing—and," she added brokenly—"that's the last we knew. If he were alive to-day we'd be rich. But—but anyway"—she tossed her head back and her eyes gleamed—"I'd rather have him and be poor, than be rich without him."

She fumbled as she picked up the stocking, the toe of which she had been repairing, almost as though she could not see it properly—as though tears were blinding her.

"The war was very terrible," said Eleanor lightly. "But it's a long time ago.

Do you think I need a hair-ribbon with this? I wonder, Sheila, if——"

Sheila went to the door.

"I spoke to you," said Eleanor shortly.

Sheila did not answer, but went out of the room, and Eleanor tossed her head angrily. Why couldn't Sheila say what she thought about her hair ribbon? It would have been so nice to contradict her in a superior way. Still, Sheila was gone.

Strangely enough, from Eleanor's point of view, Sheila often got huffed when her father was mentioned, and Eleanor found it rather tiresome. Just fancy Sheila in that old frock again! She looked in the mirror, hummed a tune and smiled. Well, let Sheila look as much a fright as she liked, Eleanor was going to be the belle of the ball. And that was what really mattered—to Eleanor.

That was what mattered, and yet not all that mattered.

There was something else—a diamond pendant.

Eleanor, as she remembered the pendant, went white as death, and turned from the mirror. A moment later she was frantically searching the room—searching again for the hundredth time since it had been lost, since that foolish day when she had put it on to impress Sheila, and then lost it, goodness knows where!

"I must find it—I must!" she gasped desperately, as she searched. "Oh, what will mother say if she finds I've borrowed it? She must never know—never!"

But, for all her searching, that pendant which she had borrowed from her mother's jewel-box on the last day of the holidays was not found—that pendant that Mrs. Lawton never wore herself because it was too precious in sentimental, as well as monetary value! Only two people knew of that borrowing—Eleanor and Sheila Wynn.

CHAPTER 2.

A Friend in Need.

SHEILA WYNN wandered down the Fourth Form corridor unseeing. Tears blinded her eyes, and it was all she could do to choke down a lump in her throat.

All the while she kept saying to herself: "I must not be silly—I must not be silly." Yet she was silly enough—if such was silliness—to want to cry whenever Eleanor

made those casual, hurtful remarks about her father.

Walking along, seeing nothing, she suddenly collided with someone. Tremendous shock it was, and realising that she had bumped into someone, she was full of apologies.

"Oh, I am so sorry, really I am—so frightfully sorry!" she said haltingly.

The other girl caught her arm.

"Blind as a bat—what?"

"Oh, Jemima!" said Sheila, and all at once it seemed as though half her cares had been lifted, although why that should have been she did not know.

"Just little me," said Jemima. "Wherefore this meandering? Thinking mighty thoughts?"

"More or less," sighed Sheila. "I say, do you know when I can get a bus to the village?"

"I dare say I might roll out a time-table from the litter in the study," offered Jemima, in her kindly way.

"Thank you, if you would. I've got to collect a parcel."

"What-ho!" agreed Jemima, smiling. "A frock! Thrilling!"

And the way she patted Sheila on the shoulder made it quite clear that nothing would have pleased her more than a new frock for Sheila. Jemima was like that.

"No, alas! Not a new frock—the old one hashed up."

"Just as good," said Jemima. "Frocks are tough propositions. Perhaps you wouldn't get one that suited you quite as well as that one—what?"

Sheila smiled faintly, and shook her head.

"You don't think that really; you're just being kind. But I think you're a darling for saying it," she said, and they turned back to Jemima's study.

Jemima flung open the door and then paused, sighing in mock sadness. The afternoon sunlight lit up one of the most untidy rooms Sheila had ever seen, and she laughed. Jemima sighed and shook her head.

"The study," she said, eyes twinkling. "Our study—Clara's little study—Jemima's little study, and Marjorie Hazeldene's burden—the trial of her life—what?"

Sheila laughed.

"Well, I must say you two lead her a dance," she said. "Poor Marjorie likes everything so tidy, doesn't she? And Clara—well, goodness. And you?"

There were books on the floor. There were Marjorie's needlework oddments littered on the floor by Clara, who had knocked over a chair, and, of course, not picked it up. Shoes on the table, a comb and hairbrush. Almost everything was on the floor or table.

"Everything but a time-table," said Jemima. "Sure to be! And to think how sternly I was brought up—in the real Spartan spirit, you know! 'Don't drop crumbs on the floor,' 'Mind you always shut the door,' and so on," she added as she grovelled and groped amongst the litter for a time-table. The buses went quite near to Cliff House, and took one into the village of Friardale.

While Jemima searched, Sheila looked around the small study. Untidy though it was, what a home it looked! There was a photograph of Jemima's father, wearing a monocle such as hers; a handsome, dapper-looking man. There were photographs of Clara's people, and of Marjorie's father, Marjorie's mother having died years ago. Poor Marjorie! Was it worse to have no father or no mother?

"Here we are," said Jemima, in triumph. "Hurrah! Time-table! Now, let me see. Is this Sunday?"

"Of course it isn't."

"Saturday?"

"You goose!" laughed Sheila. "It's Tuesday. Fancy forgetting the night of the dance."

"True, true," said Jemima thoughtfully, seated on the ground. "However, now here's a very nice bus, three-forty-five. How would that do? Or I could offer you one almost as good at four-fifteen—quite a nice bus, you know."

"I'll take the three-forty-five, thanks, Jemima. Is there anything you want in Friardale?"

"In Courtfield," said Jemima. "Suppose we go together?"

"Oh, yes, I'd like that!"

"You don't look as though you like it much," smiled Jemima, rising to her feet. "Look sort of sad and wistful, like a puppy left out in the rain."

"Yes, and I feel like it," Sheila admitted, in a low voice.

Then how ashamed of herself she was! Why should she worry Jemima with her misery? Just because she was unhappy, was there any need for her to pass it on?

She tried to brighten, and smiled.

"I didn't mean that," she said, when Jemima's grey eyes were upon her, seriously, thoughtfully.

"Unfortunately, you did," said Jemima. "But cheer up, my cherub! If you look as pretty as that to-night, you'll be a sensation. Why wasn't I blessed with a complexion like yours?"

"Silly!"

But it was rather pleasing, all the same. They went upstairs to the dormitory together, to put on their outdoor things. Sheila, side-glancing at Jemima, thought how attractive she was. Not of the "frilly-frilly" type, for Jemima was always rather severely dressed. Jemima looked smart, and she was extraordinarily good-looking, too, with her reddish-brown hair and twinkling eyes.

"Dirty face?" she asked, as she found Sheila's eyes upon her. "No time to wash. Try rubbing it off."

"No, of course you haven't a dirty face," Sheila laughed. "Quite the reverse. Come on! We haven't any time to spare. We shall miss the bus."

And, arm-in-arm, off they went.

CHAPTER 3.

Sheila to the Rescue.

BEING with Jemima was like a tonic to Sheila. She didn't feel so miserable now. Somehow, poverty didn't matter, and the fact that one was shabby became of no account at all, since Jemima seemed not to observe the fact.

Of course, Jemima would not hurry; she never hurried. But all the same, they managed to catch the bus, with a little sprint. Both of them had obtained monitress' passes earlier in the day, and they were highly elated at being out of school when it was not ordinarily a holiday.

How much jollier it seemed being in a bus on Tuesday afternoon than on Wednesday! It seemed like going into a new world. Different people in the bus, and different business going on.

"Cheerio!" said Jemima, as the bus pulled up. "I may see you when I come back through Friardale, what?"

"Yes, perhaps," said Sheila.

She watched the bus go down the road, and waved a farewell to Jemima, then

turned towards the small shop where her dress had been cleaned and renovated.

Of course the dress was not ready!

"Oh dear!" Sheila said to the woman in the shop. "Won't it be ready at all this afternoon?"

"In an hour's time, I should think," said the woman. "I'll get on the 'phone. It has to come from Courtfield."

"Courtfield! I might have gone on there and then collected it, if I had known. The bus has gone now, I think. Oh, what a pity!"

The woman was sorry, but she could do nothing but telephone. What ages she seemed on the telephone, and even then she came back with bad news.

"The dress is ready, but it can't be sent out. If you could call for it, miss—at our Courtfield branch—"

Could she? What was the fare to Courtfield? Eightpence return. How Eleanor would have sniffed at eightpence! Such an amount was beneath her consideration. But to Sheila it meant a good deal. She had, in all, a shilling, and that would have to last her for some time. Sixpence a week was her pocket-money, and a journey to Courtfield and back used up nearly ten days' supply.

"If not?" she said anxiously.

"I am afraid that it cannot come until to-morrow," said the woman kindly.

That settled it, of course. She simply had to go to Courtfield.

While she waited for the bus in the High Street, three other Cliff House girls walked by, girls in her own Form. They were Marcia Loftus, Gwen Cook, and Nancy Bell.

She saw those three girls exchange glances and nudges, and then giggle. Oh, it was easy enough to see that they were giggling at her. It was the shabbiness of her winter coat that amused them, and the fact that it was a little short in the sleeves because she had grown rather quickly. Very funny, of course.

Sheila knew the character of those three girls. They were the "black sheep" of the Fourth, ever ready to do some spiteful act.

They had been vastly amused at Sheila's poverty when first she had come to Cliff House, but of late they had left her alone, realising that Sheila treated them with contempt.

They nudged one another as Sheila ap-

proached, and she could hear their remarks, uttered in tones calculated to reach her ears. But Sheila did not flinch. She walked on firmly, her head held high.

Marcia, Gwen, and Nancy were not popular girls, and not in any way representative of the Fourth Form.

Barbara Redfern, the Form captain, Clara Trevlyn, Mabel Lynn—they were the girls. Barbara, who was always happy, who was such a good leader, and not a bit conceited despite the fact that she played all games so well. Mabel, who could act as well as some professionals. Clara, who was a jolly tomboy and delighted in earning lines. They did not sneer at her! But Marcia, Nancy, and Gwen—what did they matter?

Yet they did rather matter, and Sheila turned away as they walked past.

"Oh, cut dead!" said Marcia, with a sneer. "What shall we do?"

"Bit of luck!" said Gwen Cook. "Pity she wears the school hat. Really, it's a disgrace the way she goes about!"

"Perhaps she knows we'd cut her if she didn't cut us," said Nancy.

All those remarks were made loud enough for Sheila to hear them, of course. How glad she was that they were not waiting for the bus! And how glad she was when at last the bus came!

The journey into Courtfield took about twenty minutes, but to Sheila, busy with her thoughts, it seemed no time ere the bus drew up in the Market Place.

The shop she had to go to was rather hard to find in Courtfield, but she did find it at last, and, what was more, her dress was ready for her.

She was quite surprised when she saw it. Really, it did not look too bad. The alterations had made a most astonishing difference. There was quite a sparkle in her eyes.

The bill was paid, the money having been saved up, with exactly the right amount. And when it had been paid she had just fourpence left from her shilling—that and her return ticket.

Still, she felt a good deal happier now. With the paper parcel tucked under her arm, and held lightly for fear of making creases, she went out into the street.

There was no sign of Jemima, but then, probably, she was farther down in the town. The street in which Sheila stood was only a secondary one, and there were

few people about. Cars flashed by now and again, and as it was muddy, she kept against the wall.

It was yet twenty minutes before the bus went, so there was no hurry, and she sauntered easily along, catching up, nevertheless, the person who was just in front of her—a man who walked with a stick—tapping it on the pavement.

It was not for some minutes that she realised the significance of that. He was tall, upright, and well-built, a fine-looking man. But he walked carefully, tapping the stick in front of him. Blind! That was it! He was blind!

Sheila's heart was filled with compassion at sight of that tragic figure. How dreadful it must be to be blind! she was thinking.

Now he paused on the edge of the kerb and listened. Surely he was not going to cross that dangerous road—alone? Sheila, quite frightened, gasped, and hurried forward.

Yes, he was going to cross the road! And now a large limousine was coming along, making no sound that could overcome that of a barrel-organ that was playing farther down the street.

The blind man was stepping out into the road, and he was behind a large van. Thus obscured, he would step into the road, and the limousine driver would not be able to see him until too late.

All that flashed across Sheila's mind as she ran forward.

"Stop!" she cried.

The man seemed not to hear. Tapping with his stick, to judge where the road was, he stepped off the kerb, and the limousine glided smoothly along. In a moment the two would surely meet!

Sheila sprang forward into the road. The limousine seemed almost on top of the man, but she did not hesitate. Heedless of the risk she ran, she caught the man by the arm, and had an instantaneous view of the chauffeur of the limousine, his face white, wrenching at the wheel.

Only just in time she managed to drag the man clear. It was an escape from death by inches.

"Oh!" she gasped.

But the man was saved. Both of them were safe. And the car-driver, seeing that by a quick glance, went on, but more slowly.

"What was that?" the blind man asked. "A car?"

"Yes, yes. You're safe now," Sheila said comfortingly.

How splendid he looked, tall, and with fine features, yet a little alarmed, fully realising the narrowness of the escape.

"You saved my life," he said. "Thank you! You are very brave!"

"Not brave—quick!" she said, to make light of it. "Please let me see you across the road."

And even as she said that she remembered her parcel. Gone! In the excitement it must have slipped out from under her arm. But where was it?

Alas, it was easily enough seen! There it lay in the road—paper split open, dress bearing the mud marks of the wheels, twisted and torn.

"Oh!" gasped Sheila, in dismay. "Oh, goodness!"

And, stooping, she gathered it up. "You are not hurt?" exclaimed the man anxiously. "Please! I'm so sorry! It was careless of me."

"No, no! It is all right!" she said, and choked back her tears. "I'm not hurt a scrap. But you really ought not to attempt to cross the roads alone."

"No, I ought not to," he said; and his voice was very pleasant. "Usually my nurse-housekeeper is with me, but it was her afternoon out and I wanted some tobacco."

"Please let me see you home."
"No, no, my child. You are very kind and very brave. Thank you for what you did! Thank you! I wish I could see you. You have a nice voice, rather like —"

He broke off, the comparison unfinished. "But I only live a short distance away."

"Then I can help you home."
"Ah, you are too kind! I am rather a nuisance, I'm afraid. I live in the little cottage with the black door. They tell me it is black. Rather nice, a black door, don't you think? It is called the Little Cottage."

"I know it," said Sheila. "It isn't far."

She shook her ruined, muddy dress, and tucked it under her arm. What did a dress matter, really, compared with such misfortune as his? How she hated herself

then for worrying about such a petty thing as a dance frock!

Holding his arm, she steered him safely across the road and along to the Little Cottage, a small, attractive place, set back from the road in the midst of a charming garden. The door was unlatched, and there she left him.

But all at once she felt miserable and ashamed of herself for making so much of her trifling worries. She wanted to help this man. He was so tall and courageous with his affliction, smiling, and by his look a man who smiled often.

"Perhaps I could come and read aloud to you, sometimes?" she faltered.

"That would be very nice of you. But you must not trouble yourself—or worry!" He reached out and patted her shoulder. "Thank you very much—thank you a thousand times!"

He raised his hat and went into the house, but Sheila stood for a while in the porch, before turning away. How splendid he was! He was just the sort of man she had imagined her own father to be. Oh, if only she could read aloud to him sometimes! If only she could help him!

She went back to the roadway; then, suddenly remembering her bus, she hurried, turned into the alleyway that led to the main road—and bumped into Jemima Carstairs!

"Oh!" she gasped. "Fancy meeting you, Jemima!"

"And fancy meeting you!" Jemima said seriously, giving Sheila a long, admiring look. "I saw you helping that blind man. Good for you! Jolly good!"

Sheila blushed, and hid her muddy parcel.

"Oh, that was nothing!" she demurred. "I say, Jemima, don't say anything at the school—promise!"

"Rot! Of course I shall say!" said Jemima.

"Oh, but you mustn't. Please!" begged Sheila.

"Hiding your light under a bushel?" mused Jemima. "But just as you like. What of the frock?"

"Oh, that's all right! I—I can put that into shape," said Sheila uncomfortably. "Are you coming to get the bus?"

"No. Got to take the next," said Jemima. "I must take these flowers to the Little Cottage."

"The—the Little Cottage! But—but it

"I know," smiled *Jemima*. "That is *Captain Hargrave*. My father knows him, and I'm taking him some flowers. He likes flowers. Cheer-ho! See you at the dance!"

Sheila hesitated, then smiled, and went her way. It was strange that *Jemima* should know *Captain Hargrave*; and yet, why not? She remembered now that *Jemima* had more than once mentioned a friend of her father's, who had been badly wounded in the War, and was living in *Courtfield*.

Of course, it was the same man. Nothing really surprising in that. Then *Sheila* looked at her dance frock and groaned. What was to be done now? The dress was ruined beyond repair. No dance for her! That money spent on cleaning—wasted. And yet, had not the dress been spoiled in a good cause?

Then *Jemima's* pet piece of advice came to her. "Chin up and a straight left!" So up went *Sheila's* chin. But in her heart—well, she could not help wishing that she could have helped *Captain Hargrave* and kept that dress intact as well.

CHAPTER 4.

A Shock for Eleanora.

WHAT a hustle and what a bustle at *Cliff House*! The time for the dance was drawing nearer. How excellently the large Hall had been decorated! The floor was cleared and polished. The band had been given a special position on the dais that *Miss Primrose* occasionally occupied, and all around it were palms, making it look very delightful.

"My hat! O.K.!" was *Clara Trevlyn's* opinion. "Bit slippery, though!"

And *Clara* slid a few steps across the floor.

"Oh, *Clara*, such a tomboy!" said *Marjorie*, in despair.

"I sus-say, you girls, where's the boofay?" asked the thin, reedy voice of *Bessie Bunter*.

"The whatter?" said *Clara*.

"The boofay! You know. I dare say," said *Bessie* patronisingly, "you call it buffit."

Bessie Bunter was an exceedingly fat girl, and her round face now looked very shiny. A pair of very thick glasses sat upon her podgy, turned-up nose, and the blink she gave *Clara* was intensely magnified by them.

"The buffet!" said *Clara*, knitting her brows, although, of course, she knew quite well what *Bessie Bunter* meant. *Bessie's* first thought was naturally for the food department. If *Bessie* had been stranded in Tibet she would have guessed the Tibetan for meringue—assuming that Tibetans eat meringues!

"Yes, the boofay!" said *Bessie*. "Where we eat."

"But this is a dance, *Tubby*!" said *Clara*, doing more steps. "Not a bun fight."

"Still, we have to eat!" blinked *Bessie*. "I get jolly hungry, dancing. And all my partners suggest sitting out the dance after we've done a few steps."

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked *Clara*; and *Marjorie* smiled, too.

No wonder *Bessie's* partners suggested sitting out dances!

"Perhaps they forget to bring their cranes!" said *Clara*, shaking her head. "But the buffet will appear all right. Of course, you heard the regulation? No girl is to go into the buffet more than once."

Clara winked at *Marjorie*, but *Bessie* did not see the wink, and her fat face fell.

"Then I shan't be able to dance," she said. "Oh dear! Well, never mind. I shall be able to watch the dancing from there if it's near the Hall."

She meant to go in at once—and stop in.

Bessie Bunter rolled away, and others came on the scene. It was not time to be getting dressed yet, and the girls naturally wanted to see how things were going. There was an air of bustle and excitement in the school. Girls would bob out of rooms bearing dresses, and disappear in a flash.

No lessons anywhere. Latin was forgotten, mathematics were a mere myth! On with the dance!

"Jolly good!" said *Freda Foote*, eyeing the Hall. "Wonder when my people will be coming?"

"Yes, and mine," said *Clara*. "I shall have to look frightfully good, you know."

I say, what fun!" And she jumped up and down for the sheer joy of the thing.

"Clara," came a sharp voice, "behave yourself!"

Miss Bullivant, the mathematics mistress, swept across the Hall, thin and tall and angular.

"Yes, Miss Bullivant," said Clara meekly.

"Just practising new steps," said Freda Foote in her impish way. "Can you dance the creeping monkey, Miss Bullivant?" she asked, in her peculiarly innocent way.

Miss Bullivant shot up her eyebrows.

"Certainly not. There will be no jazzing here to-night. If that was the—er—sleeping monkey, then it will certainly not be danced."

"Oh dear!" said Freda Foote. "I've learned the wrong thing."

Miss Bullivant went on, and Clara nearly doubled up. Fancy thinking a hop-skip-and-jump was a dance!

Then Mabel Lynn and Barbara Redfern came down the stairs.

"Post!" said Barbara. "I'd forgotten all about it, girls."

"My hat, so had I!" gasped Clara. "Not that there's likely to be anything, as my people are coming, complete with bags of money for me."

Still, they all went to the rack. Either most of the girls had collected their letters or the mail was unusually small, for only three letters were there.

"One for Nancy Bell, one for Eleanor, and one for Gwen," said Barbara. "Probably important. Gwen and Nancy are out. Eleanor's in her room. I say, shall I take it up to her?"

"What, wait on that girl—poof!" said Clara.

"Well, I may as well. It might be important," said Barbara. And, like the good sort she was, she took the letter up to Eleanor's study.

Eleanor was manicuring her nails with an elaborate set spread out before her on the table.

"Oh, you did make me jump!" she gasped, as Barbara rat-tatted and pushed open the door. She sounded quite peevish.

"Sorry," said Barbara. "Have you cut that one the wrong shape?"

Eleanor spread out her right hand and looked at it with eyes half closed. Barbara

gave her an amused look and did the same, moving her head to one side.

"Sweet," she said. "A little more off the forefinger, perhaps?"

"Oh, I don't think so!" said Eleanor, taking her seriously. "This is the fashionable shape now, you know, and this polish is really splendid."

"Good!" said Barbara cheerfully. "Then everyone is satisfied. Here's a letter for you. Thought it might be important."

"Oh, put it down!" said Eleanor, and looked at her other hand. Not a thank you! Really, Barbara might have been a servant. One look Barbara gave her, then shrugged her shoulders and went out.

Eleanor threw a glance at the letter then, and, seeing that it was from her mother, took it up and opened it, pouting.

"I suppose mother isn't coming. What a nuisance, when she was going to wear her diamonds!" she said crossly.

She took out the letter and read it. Her mother would not be able to come.

"Something rather surprising has happened, dear," her mother wrote. "We think we have traced your Aunt Angela. You have probably heard us mention her. Her husband was reported missing in the War—which really means he is killed. Aunt Angela was always proud, and would not accept charity, and cut herself off from us all, even though she had a little daughter, your Cousin Sheila. (Sheila must be about your own age now.) Well, dear, there is reason to believe that Aunt Angela's husband, Sheila's father, is, after all, alive! Alive with impaired memory and perhaps under another name—"

Eleanor read the letter with a pout, although it were a tiresome obligation.

"Sheila!" she said. "Never heard of her! Cousin Sheila! Cousins are a nuisance." Everyone who might rob her of a little limelight was a nuisance.

She read on, however:

"Of course, if your uncle should prove to be alive, he will come into quite a fortune, which is now in the hands of the Public Trustee. In any case, Sheila will come into it when she is twenty-one."

Worse and worse! Eleanor frowned darkly. Not only a Cousin Sheila, but one who would come into a fortune. The idea! Whatever next!

But the next words seemed to leap right out of the letter.

"We never told you anything of this because you were so young; it all happened when you were quite a tiny girl. And Captain Wynn—"

Wynn! Cousin Sheila! The letter dropped from Eleanor's hands, and she looked quite dazed. Sheila Wynn! A coincidence, of course, she told herself. Why should there not be two such girls? Merely a coincidence, and nothing more. But how strange—and Sheila Wynn, who shared the study with her, had lost her father in the War. Not killed—reported missing? Then surely—

Eleanor sat quite still, the colour mounting to her cheeks.

"What nonsense!" she exclaimed. "That girl my cousin! What utter nonsense!"

Then, biting her lip, she read on. There was very little more about the matter save to explain how charming and gallant Captain Wynn had been. But there was something else that made Eleanor gasp aloud in dismay. A bad day for her, this!

"Now, dear, for some bad news," the letter went on. "I cannot find my diamond pendant—the one that belonged to your father's mother. I trust you did not take it out and mislay it in the holidays, precious; but there, I know you wouldn't, as you were forbidden to touch it. If it is lost goodness knows what daddy will say."

Eleanor crumpled the letter in her hand. If it were lost—why, it was lost, and she had lost it. Oh, what would her father say? How angry he would be! He would stop her lavish allowance; he would refuse to let her have so many dresses.

"Mummy will never know," she muttered. "I will write to-night and say I didn't take it. No one else knows—"

Sheila! Sheila knew. Had she not shown it to her and bragged? But why should Sheila and her mother ever meet?

Cousin Sheila—Cousin Sheila something

seemed to say. If this Sheila were her cousin, then sooner or later truth would out. Sooner or later mother would know about the pendant.

Eleanor drew a quick breath. "She can't be my cousin. She mustn't be!"

But even as she muttered the words there was a quick step in the corridor; the door opened, and there entered—Sheila. Eleanor gave a violent start and looked at her resentfully. Then, noticing the muddy parcel, she added:

"Why, whatever's that?"
"Just my dress," sighed Sheila sadly. "It fell into the road—and look—just look at it!"

Eleanor looked, opened her eyes wide, and then burst into a peal of laughter.

"Look at it! Oh, look!" she cried. "Just look! Oh, you silly! Fancy dropping it! What a sight it looks!"

Sheila drew herself up, and for once her eyes were cold and her voice stern.

"I don't see anything to laugh at," she said.

"Ha, ha!" sniggered Eleanor. "I do. You can't wear that to-night. You simply can't."

Quite suddenly she became serious. "Is your mother coming to-night?" she asked.

"No," said Sheila.
As if her mother could afford the fare!
"Someone was saying your mother's name was Angela," commented Eleanor, as though quite casually.

Sheila looked quite surprised.
"I don't see that my mother's name is anyone's business, but if you must know, it is Angela," she said, and then stared. "Why, what ever's the matter?"

"Matter—matter? Nothing's the matter!" snapped Eleanor; but she had gone pale. "Only I—I bet someone it was Alice. I knew it began with an A."

She had quite recovered her composure now, and Sheila, unable to understand this interest in her mother's name, turned away.

Eleanor, the moment the other's attention was distracted, turned to the fire, and, without waiting to read the end of her mother's letter, threw it into the fire. Sheila, her cousin! Not if she knew it; and she watched the flames consuming the letter until it was all ash! For the present, anyway, Sheila and mother must be kept apart!

"Your mother coming?" asked Sheila.

"No, thank goodness!" said Eleanor, and then got up from her chair and went out of the room, Sheila staring after her.

What was wrong with Eleanor? she wondered.

Almost as Eleanor went out of the study someone else came in, a Cliff House servant, bearing a large brown cardboard box.

"Miss Sheila," she said. "A parcel for you!"

"For me?" gasped Sheila.

The girl put the box on to the table, and Sheila took it up, amazed. Sure enough, on the box was the label:

"Miss Sheila Wynn,
Fourth Form,
Cliff House School,
Kent."

There was no mistake—it was for her. And the name on the box—"Lucille's, Courtfield."

Why, Lucille was an exclusive dress-maker. Lucille—for her? There was surely a mistake!

With trembling fingers she opened the box, and on top of the tissue-paper was an envelope addressed to her. Inside was a typewritten sheet.

It said:

"As a token of admiration for a very noble girl, from one who admires her."

That was all! Sheila stared at the box, her senses reeling. Then, as in a trance, she folded back the tissue-paper and took out—a dress, and such a dress. It was the most beautiful, the most splendid frock she had seen, a thing of wonder.

And it was for her!

CHAPTER 5. Whose Frock!

SHEILA WYNN hugged the dress to her; and then, although her eyes were too brimmed with tears to allow her to see anything very clearly, she held that beautiful frock at arm's length to study it.

For her! Such a wonderful frock! Oh, there was a mistake, surely! Who would send her a frock?

She looked at the label on the box; she studied the message that accompanied it.

No, there was no doubt that the frock was hers, and that message, too, was easily understood. Someone had seen her help the blind man across the road, and this was the result.

Rap, rap! came suddenly at the door, which was pushed open to allow Clara Trevlyn to look in.

"Hallo, hallo!" said Clara in her cheery way; and then saw the frock. "Goodness! What's this?"

"A—a frock. Sent to me," said Sheila, still quite overcome.

Clara turned back into the corridor, and in a voice that could have been heard in the school Hall, called to her friends:

"Babs! Marjorie! Jimmy! Quick! Wonderful frock—"

Then she entered the study and put her arms akimbo.

"Well, you are a fraud," she said, her eyes twinkling, "pretending you were going to have an old frock touched up, and then dazzle us all like this! I say, do look!" she added as Barbara Redfern, followed by Marjorie Hazeldene, entered the room.

Barbara stood and looked, smiling. Marjorie Hazeldene, who loved frocks almost as much as she did flowers, went into ecstasies.

"Oh, Sheila, how splendid! It's marvellous!"

"Lucky you!" said Barbara. "We're doing a round of the studies to see the frocks before they're put on, you know."

"To see what they're really like," explained Clara, fingering the delicate material. "A pretty penny this cost."

Then Barbara stooped to the floor to pick up a scrap of paper. She turned it over, started, and then hurriedly put it down. But what a look she gave Sheila. It was the message she had picked up.

Sheila blushed.

"I might as well be quite honest," she said, with a nervous little laugh. "I didn't buy this myself."

"Not out of your pocket-money," agreed Clara, laughing. "My hat, no! But nor did I buy mine. I look to the mater for that, you know. Give appealing glances and write letters with crowds of P.S.'s."

"But my mother didn't buy it."

"Sounds like a riddle," said Freda Foote, poking her head in at the doorway.

"Spiffing frock!" Mabel said quickly.

"Looks as though it fell from the sky."

"Which is what it did, more or less."

laughed Sheila. "Oh dear! I don't know if I ought to accept it. You see—"

They all looked at her wonderingly. What was the girl driving at? But there was one girl who knew—Barbara.

Poor Sheila was in a quandary. Ought she to accept the present? Why, she did not really know who had sent it! Suppose it were a mere hoax, a joke of some kind? Suppose the label was just a mistake?

"Try it on," said Clara. "I'm all twittering with impatience. That the front?"

"Oh, Clara! The back!" said Marjorie Hazeldene merrily.

All the same, Clara was interested in dresses, and she held up the frock, insisting that Sheila slipped it on. Of course, stockings would not match, and the dress would hardly be shown at its best worn like that. But what a temptation, especially to a girl who had not had a new frock for ages!

The frock was put on the table. Clara insisted, Marjorie pleaded, Freda gave advice, and Barbara gave the casting vote. But Sheila left the dress on the table, and wondered.

Of course, it was hard for the others to understand how she felt. But the truth was that Sheila, being so poor, was a little awed by the magnificent frock, quite unable to believe that it could be hers, and in a panic lest it were not and she should spoil it.

While they all stood thus in hesitation, someone else came along the corridor.

"What's this crowd?" said someone pertly.

Eleanor Lawton that was, of course! "Just looking at a frock that's arrived," said Freda, winking at the others.

Eleanor Lawton stepped into the study. She saw the dress, and the cardboard box and the tissue-paper, and her eyes opened wide. Then she fairly jumped forward and took up the frock.

"Oh, oh! How ripping of mother!" she cried. "What a darling it is, girls! Another new frock for me! Hurrah!"

She looked at them, not seeing how dazed they were. Eleanor was far too much taken up with her own delight to be aware of anything else. She held the dress before her and preened delightedly.

Sheila? Well, Sheila, instead of stepping forward and taking that dress as the others had supposed she would, hung back and looked strangely agitated.

Eleanor's frock? Why not? Was not Eleanor very rich and much indulged?

True, she had already one new dance frock in which she had swaggered; but why not two? The label was a mistake.

"I really don't know which to wear," said Eleanor, thrilled.

"Better wear your own," said Clara, in her candid, blunt way. "It's best in the long run."

Eleanor almost collapsed; but instantly she recovered.

"My own!" she said, tossing her head. "Indeed! And whose is this, pray, if not mine?"

What a shout there was!

"Sheila's!"

Eleanor was staggered; she lowered the dress limply.

"Sheila's! Nonsense!" she retorted sharply. "What utter nonsense! This wonderful dress Sheila's? Why, she hasn't a penny in the world!"

"I'm afraid it is hers, though," said Barbara, rather sternly. "Here's the box lid, and there is her name written on it."

Eleanor put the dress down, examined the label on the box, and then before Sheila, who stepped forward, could stop her, she had picked up the little slip of paper that had been put inside the box.

"As a token of admiration for a very noble girl, from one who admires her," she read, and the slip of paper quivered in her hand.

Sheila reached forward, and took the piece of paper, almost guiltily.

"The dress is mine," she said. "I'm sorry you have been disappointed, Eleanor." Even after all that rudeness Sheila could find it in her heart to be sorry for Eleanor! But Eleanor was not at all in reciprocal mood.

"Disappointed! There's a mistake. What nonsense! I'd like to know where that dress came from. An admirer, indeed! Poof! Why, I—"

She stared at the dress, and then drew up, a new light in her eyes.

"Thought of something?" asked Freda.

"Yes, I have," said Eleanor. "Oh, yes! I remember a dress that someone was going to have—a dress just like that! And you remember it, Marjorie—and you, Clara!"

She held up the dress and laughed. Oh, it was a horrid laugh!

Marjorie looked at the dress and thought. Clara looked at it.

"My hat!" said Clara. "Wasn't Jimmy's new frock—"

"I think Jemima—" began Marjorie.

They broke off and exchanged wondering glances.

Eleanor laughed hysterically.

"Jemima, of course. This is hers. I remember her describing it. It's a little different; but that's been done deliberately." What a look she gave Sheila. "Anyway, I will take it along to Jemima."

Then Sheila seemed to come to life. There was an angry spot in either cheek. Eleanor's insults had stung her to the quick.

"You will do nothing of the sort," she said, and took hold of the dress.

"I will!" snapped Eleanor.

"Why not ask Jemima to come?" said Barbara mildly. "Although, really, as it is addressed to Sheila—"

Eleanor turned to the door, a very determined look on her weak face. Eleanor was incensed. The idea of Sheila pretending the frock was hers!

But Sheila was not to be so easily down-trodden. She held on to the dress.

Alas! There came the sound of tearing material, and both girls dropped the frock as though it had suddenly become red hot.

Marjorie Hazeldene dropped to her knees, picked up the frock and examined it, while Sheila, wide-eyed, could only stare. That lovely frock! Ruined!

At that moment the door opened and Jemima came into the study, and sank gracefully into a chair.

"Your frock arrived yet, Jimmy?" asked Clara quickly.

"Not yet," said Jemima. "No. Hallo! What's this?"

CHAPTER 6.

A Rash Accusation.

JEMIMA CARSTAIRS polished her monocle and surveyed the strange scene in the study, and then she met Sheila's eyes. Sheila looked miserable quite often, but never so miserable as now. No one spoke for a moment. Then Marjorie spoke.

"I can mend this so that it won't show," she said, "quite easily."

"Pretty frock!" said Jemima. "Yours, Eleanor?"

Eleanor stared. Had Jemima not recognised her own frock?

"No, it's yours, isn't it?" she said, a little blankly, and quite taken aback.

"Mine?" said Jemima. "Is it addressed to me?"

Everyone began to talk at once, and Jemima, unable to hear anything clearly, picked up the box lid.

"Sheila Wynn," she said. "Congratulations, Sheila! Lucky you, what? This will stagger the natives, and bring faint moans of envy, what?"

Sheila looked into Jemima's eyes, and suddenly she saw there the truth. An admirer! Who but she knew that she had rescued the blind man? She, the man himself—and Jemima Carstairs? No mere onlooker, had there been one, would have known her name. The blind man could not know it, unless given by Jemima. Jemima, therefore, knew the truth.

"Oh, Jemima, you—you—" But words failed Sheila completely.

Words failed Eleanor, too!

"You mean to say this isn't your frock?" she asked.

"Well, my frocks don't usually arrive addressed to other people," said Jemima, polishing her monocle. "Moreover, it's a frock, and not a rag book, or anything like that. I seemed to see a tug-of-war in progress when I came. Who won?"

"The dress lost," said Freda. "Eleanor's all cut up about it. She thought it was hers, and now she won't believe it's Sheila's. Why not take it round the school, Eleanor?"

Eleanor bit her lip.

"I think you're very unkind to make fun of me," she faltered. "How should I know it was Sheila's? And I don't believe it is now. She wrote that message herself. She—"

"Tosh!" said Clara abruptly.

"Nonsense!" said Barbara. "Really, you're being just spiteful, Eleanor."

Marjorie Hazeldene smiled at Sheila now, and patted her arm.

"Don't worry," she said. "This can very soon be mended. I'll take it to my study and then bring it when it's ready. But—gracious," she gasped, "time's getting on, girls!"

All at once they remembered the time,

and what a scurrying there was! Jemima was the first to leave. Jemima, indeed, disappeared with what Sheila thought suspicious haste. There were so many things she wanted to say to Jemima.

The study door closed, and Eleanor and Sheila were left together.

Eleanor suddenly turned to Sheila, her face white.

"And now there's something I want to say to you," she said. "I have a bone to pick. Where is my pendant?"

Sheila met her look calmly. "I have told you already I do not know. What do you imagine, that I have taken it and hidden it?"

"I wouldn't like to say!" exclaimed Eleanor nastily. "But I am wondering where that dress came from. A fine idea putting that message in! You're as poor as can be—your mother's poor. Your father—"

"If you dare say a word against my father!"

Eleanor drew back, for there was a gleam in Sheila's eyes that warned her she had gone too far.

"I didn't say anything about him," she said petulantly, with a motion of the hand. "You're always so touchy about him! Several other girls' fathers were killed in the War."

"My father was reported missing. He may not be dead. He may be— Oh, why do you always bring this up?" Sheila's voice rose almost to a wail, and just for a moment Eleanor felt a glow of triumph. Then she remembered the pendant.

"Anyway, it has nothing to do with the pendant," she said. "I must find it. I must, I must!" Her voice for a moment became frantic, as though she had lost control of herself. Then, calming herself, she looked fiercely at Sheila. "And you know something about it."

"I do not, except that you were silly enough to wear it one day when you went into Courtfield. It may be anywhere—in the lane—someone may have picked it up."

"That's right. Try to frighten me!" cried Eleanor, her voice rising nearly to a scream.

She walked up and down the room frantically, her face working.

"I didn't mean to. I'm sorry," apolo-

gised Sheila, in her ready way. "But you have no right to suggest that I know anything about it. Why," she added, as the realisation dawned upon her, "anyone hearing what you have just said might think you meant that I—I sold your pendant and bought that frock."

Eleanor ceased her pacing. She walked right up to Sheila and stood still, her face so close to the other's that Sheila leaned back.

"And how," she asked, "do I know that you didn't?"

Sheila met her eyes unflinchingly, for all that her face crimsoned. To be called a thief to one's face! Because one was poor one must be dishonest! Was that what Eleanor thought, in her callous way?

"You don't know what you are saying!" she said. "How dare you suggest such a thing! If ever you mention that pendant again—"

"Well?" sneered Eleanor. "I shall go to Miss Primrose and ask for my things to be searched, and insist that you admit wearing it to go out."

Eleanor went white. She stood quite still, and it was easy to see that she was terrified by that declaration.

"There's no need to go into that," she said weakly. "I—I wasn't calling you a thief, of course, Sheila. Only you know how poor you are and what a temptation it would be. I—I'll have another look for that pendant."

Sheila went out of the room and closed the door, feeling that she could not remain another moment in the study with Eleanor. And Eleanor continued to stare at the closed door, a look of concentrated hatred on her face.

"And that girl is my cousin, is she?" she muttered. "I'll take care no one knows it. My cousin! That! I know she took my pendant!"

And then she paced up and down again, wringing her hands.

"Oh dear, oh dear! If mother should find out! Oh dear, oh dear! I must find it! What a fool I was to take it!"

She made a wild movement towards the door, and actually put her hand on the knob, as though to go out. Then she changed her mind and her hand dropped to her side.

No, she decided, useless to ask Sheila

not to mention it to her mother. Anyway, Mrs. Lawton was not coming to the dance, so why should Sheila ever meet her? No one guessed that Sheila was the lost cousin. Sheila could not know that Eleanor's mother was her aunt.

To make that request would humiliate Eleanor—the one person in the world who must never suffer that. Besides, it might arouse suspicion.

CHAPTER 7.

Sheila's Triumph.

PARENTS were arriving by the dozen at Cliff House—brothers, sisters, cousins and friends. From far and near they had come to this most important function. And what an expectant crowd it was that awaited them in Hall!

Gone were all Miss Primrose's admonitions, her warnings as to ladylike deportment and fitting conduct. The Hall rang with the sound of voices and merry peals of laughter.

The Sixth and Fifth Form-rooms had been cleared of desks, and now were magnificently appointed as cloak-rooms. The games-room, leading from the Hall, was a buffet, with tables and chairs in profusion, and lobster patties, rolls, sandwiches, and all refreshments in plenty.

Barbara Redfern, captain of the Fourth Form, was greeting her mother and father, while Marjorie Hazeldene, whose father could not come, was entertaining Jack Tolhurst and his friends from Lanchester College. Clara Trevlyn, in the midst of it all, was trying her hardest not to be a tomboy.

"Oh, Clara, your hair!" reproved her mother. "So untidy, dear!"

"Oh, that!" said Clara. "Sorry, mater, but you know I pushed through the curtains of the buffet, and that isn't good for hair. Good old daddy!" she added. "Glad you've come! Look, there's Babs—and Marjorie—oh, and Jemima!"

"I s-say," came the voice of Bessie Bunter, "when does the buffet open?"

It was unfortunate that at that moment the first rush of greetings was over, and there had come a momentary lull, for Bessie's voice rang out loud and clear. There were peals of laughter from the

girls. "Bessie Bunter," was the whispered explanation.

By Bessie's side stood Eleanor Lawton, a smart evening-cloak wrapped about her, which was unsuited to her age but which brought looks of envy from the other girls.

"Here comes a f-fine car," said Bessie. "It's my father!"

The car swept up and halted. A man stepped down as the chauffeur opened the door, and Bessie jumped forward.

"Daddy!" she squealed; and then fell headlong on to the carpet that had been put down under the awning. Bump!

In amazement the man who had alighted helped the fat girl up. He was a tall, handsome man, with smiling eyes, and a kindly voice.

"Hallo, Bessie!" he said. "Sorry I'm not your father, but if I must be fatherly I'd advise you not to sit there—it's draughty!"

Captain Carstairs it was, and Jemima came out to greet him.

"Oh, really, I s-say!" gasped Bessie. "I saw it was a j-jolly fine car, so I thought it was my father."

The first dance passed.

"Anyone here seen Sheila?" asked Freda Foote. "I want my mother to see her dress. I want one like it."

Freda, drawing blank in Hall, went into the buffet, and the first person she saw was fat Bessie Bunter. Bessie had become one of the sights of the buffet.

"Where's Sheila?" asked Freda.

"All gone," said Bessie, munching a sandwich. "But try one of these."

"Duffer! I said 'Where is Sheila?'"

"Oh, Sheila," said Bessie. "She hasn't been in here—not while I've been here, anyway."

Freda grinned.

"Then she hasn't been here at all, that's clear."

Bessie blinked reproach, and her partner, Stanley Davidson Yates of Lanchester College, smiled.

"Finished the sandwich?" he asked Bessie. "How about a spot of dancing? Gives one an appetite, what?"

Bessie sighed a little wearily.

"Y-yes, I suppose we'd better, you know. Mrs. Jones keeps giving me looks, and that's the third time she's moved the plate of sandwiches out of my reach."

"Queer," said Stanley Davidson Yates,

shaking his head. "But who's this Sheila they're all talking about? Who is Sheila? Where is she?" he chanted.

"One of the girls," said Bessie.

"Just what I guessed," nodded Yates. "My arm?"

So Bessie Bunter was escorted on to the floor as the band struck up.

"Seen Sheila?" asked Yates, as he passed Jack Tollhurst.

"No. Seen Sheila?" Tollhurst asked Ginger Hawkins, who was dancing with Clara.

In a moment it became quite the thing to ask:

"Seen Sheila?"

Eleanor Lawton, who was confining her dancing to the lower end of the Hall, where there were two mirrors, heard the question and frowned.

"I say, we must go and fetch her," said Barbara Redfern, who passed near to Clara with her friend Mabel Lynn, dancing splendidly together.

"Yes, let's go and hunt her up," Mabel suggested.

The dance was in full swing, but the two girls went in search of their friend.

They scarcely noticed that Eleanor was dancing badly with Jack Tollhurst, out of step, out of time, and he was, of course, pretending that it was his fault, but wondering what had come over Eleanor. He saw Eleanor looking towards the staircase, and noticed how she watched Barbara as that girl went out of the Hall. Even then he did not understand.

"Ahem!" he said, as he stubbed her foot again. "Shall we—er—sit it out? Would you rather?"

"Yes, I think so," Eleanor replied relievedly; and then gave him a haughty look. "You don't seem to be in good dancing form, do you? I've never known a boy tread on my feet so often."

Jack crimsoned.

"Sorry," he mumbled. "I am a bit of an ass with my feet."

But he knew quite well that it had been Eleanor who had been at fault, though Eleanor, of course, would never admit that!

"Waiting for someone?" asked Jack, as they sat down.

"Yes. I—no, of course not!" she snapped.

A moment later there was a burst of

handclapping from the landing on the staircase.

There stood Marjorie Hazeldene and Mabel Lynn. It was they who clapped. And they were clapping because with them, radiant and smiling, stood Sheila Wynn!

The handclapping was a signal; and the signal was answered again.

From the other Fourth-Formers in the room there came a cheer, a glad cheer.

"Sheila! Hurrah!"

"Hurrah!"

Eleanor Lawton jumped to her feet, white with anger. She stood there staring as, a moment after the band had stopped, a crowd of girls gathered about Sheila—and not only girls, but brothers and boy friends.

Barbara Redfern came along with dancing eyes to speak to Jack Tollhurst. The band was just striking up a tune.

"Thank you," said Jack to Eleanor. "Forgive me, won't you? I'm dancing this with Barbara."

"Not with me. I've passed you on to Sheila," said Babs. "if you can get a fighting chance. The boys are round her in a crowd."

Eleanor clenched her hands. Tears shone in her eyes, and she very nearly lost her dignity so far as to stamp her foot.

There was Sheila, looking charming; and Eleanor, turning to make some remark to some lady sitting next to her, found that she, too, had fallen under the spell.

"Is that Sheila? What a pretty, charming girl, and what a lovely frock—quite the loveliest here!"

Eleanor, biting her lips, went out of the Hall.

But no one noticed her exit. Eleanor was quite effaced by Sheila.

So the dance went on without Eleanor Lawton, but with Sheila the cynosure of all eyes, happy, and quite forgetting the misery of her imprisonment. It was Sheila's evening, and the girls toasted her with ginger-beer in the buffet. Sheila was happy, and she had no wish to make another girl miserable—not even Eleanor.

As for Eleanor, when she returned at the end of the evening, looking white and with eyes red-rimmed, it was to see Sheila still the centre of attraction.

"Good-night, Sheila darling!"

"Good-night—"

That was all that Eleanor had ears to

hear—that Sheila was the centre of attraction.

Herself, she crept up to bed, no one caring whether or when she went; and she was tucked up, and pretending to sleep, when the others, tired, happy, and chattering, at last entered the dormitory, the bedclothes over her head so that she should not hear the things they were saying for her benefit.

"I'll pay her out!" she muttered. "Just let her wait, that's all!"

Sheila, all unconscious of the plans her enemy was making, undressed in the happiest possible mood, only sorry that the jolliest, most delightful evening of her life had come to an end.

CHAPTER 8.

A False Apology.

WHAT yawns there were next day in the Fourth Form at Cliff House! How dull the girls were during lessons, and yet how happy, recalling incidents of the dance, humming tunes over again, living once more the happiest moments!

"Yaw-aw!" yawned Clara, as morning lessons were over. "No dance to-night, girls, only prep."

"Don't!" pleaded Barbara. "As if we don't know!"

"And now the dance is over," said Clara, with a chuckle, "we've got to make up for lost giddy time, and swot and swot and swot!"

"Swot-ho!" said Jemima Carstairs.

They were gathered in the Hall trying to believe that this scholarly, sedate place really had been the scene of last evening's merry dance. How amazingly the school staff had effaced the traces of merriment! But Clara, of course, managed to find a souvenir—someone's dance programme.

"Hallo, Eleanor's!" she said.

And before anyone could comment Eleanor's voice was heard.

"Oh mine! I was wondering where it had gone."

She spoke quite sweetly, her mood surprisingly changed since the night before. But there was silence.

"Would you mind giving that to Eleanor, Babs?" said Clara distantly.

Barbara took the card and looked at it, and frowned.

Then she handed it to Mabel Lynn.

"Would you mind giving this to Eleanor, Mabs?" she said.

There were one or two chuckles then, but most of the girls looked very grim indeed. Sheila hung back from the crowd. She wanted to take no part at all in this, but she knew quite well that the girls had determined that Eleanor should be made to pay for her mean accusation.

Now Mabel Lynn had the card in her hand, and she frowned at it.

"Eleanor," she said vaguely. "The name seems familiar. We used to know a girl named Eleanor—"

"Wasn't there a girl named Eleanor who said things behind Sheila's back against Sheila last night?" said Clara.

Mabel looked at Eleanor, and seemed not to see her.

They had just heard that that was what Eleanor had done. She had tried to run down Sheila to Jack Tollhurst and other boys.

"Ah, well," she said, "if I put the programme on that chair, I dare say she'll find it. I shouldn't know the girl now, if I did see her."

Eleanor went white. She knew what this meant—Coventry, the most dreaded of all punishments. They were going to cut her!

Sheila, when she saw the girl's white face, was suddenly sorry and sympathetic. Sheila's nature was not adapted to vengeance, and even though she admitted that Eleanor ought to be punished, she could not find it in her heart to be unkind. Yet Eleanor did deserve it.

Little did the girls know Eleanor, however.

"I—I'm sorry!" she said.

"Sorry?" said Barbara, quite blankly.

Sheila looked at Eleanor in wonderment, and Clara Trevlyn clasped her forehead dramatically, as though the apology had stunned her.

Eleanor, however, was serious.

"I—I know what you girls think," she said. "That I was being spiteful, and—and—"

"Well, that is about it," said Mabel Lynn grimly. "Isn't it true?"

Eleanor hung her head.

"I know I did wrong," she muttered, "and I'm sorr."

The girls were in a quandary. It had been agreed that Eleanor should not be let off lightly, but they had not expected an apology. Really, it was not like her. But when a girl did apologise, how could the apology be rebuffed?

"An apology doesn't quite settle things," said Barbara coldly. "You did your best to run Sheila down during the dance to people who were only visitors to the school. It's easy to say you are sorry."

Eleanor flashed an angry look at Barbara.

"Do you want me to go down on my knees?" she asked.

There was a silence.

"It's to Sheila you should apologise," Barbara exclaimed.

"Hear, hear!"

Eleanor turned to Sheila.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I only meant it as a joke. I wasn't jealous, naturally."

"Oh, my hat!" said Clara faintly.

Sheila looked at Eleanor, her eyes shining.

"Don't say any more about it, Eleanor," she insisted. "I don't bear you any grudge. It wasn't a nice trick, but—well, it's over and done with now."

"You'll shake hands with me?" asked Eleanor.

Barbara looked at Sheila, frowning. Clara raised her eyebrows and stared hard. But there was Eleanor's hand extended.

"Yes, of course I'll shake hands," Sheila said readily enough. "I don't want to be enemies with you, Eleanor, naturally."

She held out her hand, and there was a brief clasp.

Then, amidst an uncomfortable silence, Eleanor turned on her heel and walked away, every eye following her.

It was Barbara who broke the silence, and her voice sounded incredulous.

"Well, who would have thought that? I—I don't know what to say. She ought to be sent to Coventry, but as she's apologised—"

"Oh, Babs, please let her off," pleaded Sheila. "After all, she must have felt badly about it last night, and I did have a splendid time. A better time than I can ever remember having in all my life."

Really, everyone was feeling relieved, for it was always unpleasant to send a girl to Coventry. There was such a bad atmo-

sphere in the Form, and they were all jolly girls, much preferring friendship to enmity. No one liked "cutting" a girl, least of all Sheila.

"Thank goodness!" she said, in relief. "But, honestly, I didn't expect Eleanor to be friendly. Perhaps I've misjudged her, you know!"

"Rubbish!" sniffed Clara. "Come and play hockey. I want waking up. Sticks, everyone!"

And a moment or two later they were all out in the playing fields—all except Sheila, who had not a stick to play with.

"Not playing?" asked Barbara, when they reached the ground.

Sheila blushed.

"I don't think I will, thanks," she excused herself. "I've one or two things to do in the school."

Barbara nodded, smiling, and she and the others went out on to the hockey field.

Sheila watched them for a few moments, and then left the ground; but the truth was that the dinner-bell would soon ring, and Sheila wanted to have a word with Eleanor and put that girl at her ease.

She had been furious when she had heard some of the things Eleanor had said about her while the dance was in progress, and her thoughts of Eleanor had not been of the kindest. Small wonder, either. Eleanor had suggested that Sheila was suspected of stealing. But she had had such a happy time, and she had seen Eleanor so white and near to tears just now. Her own anger had subsided.

In the clearness of morning she saw things differently. Although Eleanor's conduct was not really excusable, Sheila told herself that the girl had been jealous that her poor study companion had suddenly had an expensive, pretty frock, and that she had acted spitefully on the spur of the moment. Eleanor's was, after all, a petty nature, and it is not reasonable to expect people to act otherwise than by the dictates of their nature—unpleasant though it may be.

Consequently, she mounted the stairs to put Eleanor quite at her ease, and by her conduct and speech assure her that all really was forgiven. Remorse had probably overcome Eleanor now, and she would be miserable and distressed, so that a kindly word or two and a smile would restore her wounded pride.

It was a cheery enough smile that Sheila wore as she entered her study; but there was nothing cheery in Eleanor's greeting.

The girl was standing by the window, and she wheeled round as Sheila entered, her face dark and angry, her eyes gleaming.

"Oh!" Sheila said, rather taken aback. "I— Just came to have a chat with you, Eleanor!"

"Really?" said Eleanor, and her tone was cold and forbidding. "How interesting! How kind of you!" Then she tossed her head.

"Eleanor!" gasped Sheila. "What's the matter! Oh, dear! Don't think that I bear any malice—"

"Malice—you!" cried Eleanor glaring. "I like that! It's I who ought to bear malice! Making me apologise—humiliate myself!"

"Make you? Why, I didn't! You did that yourself."

"Yes; because they were going to send me to Coventry!"

Sheila stared, her heart heavy.

"Then, you—you didn't mean the apology?" she cried in distress.

"Mean an apology to you? You! I hate you—hate you!"

"Eleanor! And I came to say we could be friends!" Sheila implored.

"Friends with you!" panted Eleanor. "Never!" And her face was contorted with rage. She stepped forward until she was quite close to Sheila, and she seemed hardly able to control herself. "Not friends!" she rushed on. "Enemies—enemies! From this moment on, Sheila, you can count me as your worst enemy! And look out!"

CHAPTER 9.

Bessie is Indignant.

Sheila Wynn could not believe her ears.

"Eleanor, what are you saying?" she cried.

But Eleanor Lawton turned back to the window, and remained there, rigid. She seemed to be trembling with anger, and there was no doubt that she had been deeply moved.

Sheila did not mean to let matters rest there, however. It was an impossible situation. How could two girls, sharing a study,

be enemies? Life would be unbearable. And why should it be? It was not, after all, Eleanor who had the grievance.

"I can't make you out at all," Sheila said quietly. "I do not bear any malice, and I don't really see why you should, Eleanor. I don't see that you have anything to complain about."

But Eleanor did. She wheeled upon Sheila furiously.

"Nothing to complain about?" she cried. "Oh, haven't I, indeed! I haven't forgotten the way you went on at the dance, sweeping down as though you owned the place! And then having the cheek to take my partner—telling him about me, perhaps!"

The note of anger had changed slightly. That last remark had been a definite question. Was that, then what was worrying Eleanor?

"Eleanor, you are being unjust!" Sheila protested. "I didn't say one word to Jack Tollhurst about you. If that's what's worrying you, you can set your mind at rest."

Eleanor did look a little relieved, but there was nothing to show it by her tone, which was sharp and bitter as before.

"Of course I'm not worrying about that," she said contemptuously. "Jack would understand. But it's the—the principle of the thing—your having the cheek to go up and dance with him when he was talking to me."

What a thing to say—as though Sheila had behaved forwardly! It was no wonder that she became quite angry herself.

"Don't be absurd! Barbara brought him to me, and gave me her dance!" she exclaimed.

"Oh, get out!" Eleanor cried in fury. "Get out of this study, you little cadger! My gracious! The idea of you trying to worm your way among nice people! Get out, do! Go and tell the girls what I've said!"

Sheila, head proudly raised, opened the door, and without another word went from the study. If she had turned back then she would have had a shock; she would have seen Eleanor in the armchair, crying bitterly, hot, angry tears scalding her cheeks. But she did not return, being only too glad to get away from her tormentor's presence.

The dinner-bell rang as she left the study, and she joined the throng of girls descend-

ing. But although she spoke to Barbara, who was captain of the Fourth Form, and to Mabel, not one word did she tell them of the scene that had just taken place. If she had Barbara would have had a good deal to say; but Sheila could not bring herself to tell tales.

"I sus-say, hurry up, Sheila!" squeaked Bessie Bunter from just behind. "There's roast beef for dinner! You might let me pass!"

"Make way for Bessie!" called Freda Foote. "Clear a double passage-way there, girls!"

But the girls, instead, blocked Bessie's path effectively amidst much merriment, whilst the fat girl gasped and grunted vexatiously.

"Oh, really, you're jolly well doing it on purpose, Kik-Clara!" Bessie gasped.

The girls in front of her exchanged winks, and Sheila stepped in Bessie's path as she tried to struggle through, and then Clara quickly filled her place. Bessie sniffed in disdain, and in exasperation gave Freda Foote a playful push.

"Oooch!" gasped Freda. "Help, girls! An earthquake—"

Freda flung her arms round Clara's neck, and Clara clutched at Sheila, who, to save herself from falling, grasped Barbara, who had the presence of mind to cling to the banisters. Bessie Bunter lost her balance, clutched wildly at the banisters, stumbled, fell, and then, shrieking wildly, rolled down the stairs.

"Oh, my goodness!" gasped Clara. "Bessie, you duffer—"

"Look out, in front!"

Bump, bump, bump! went Bessie down the stairs. She was too fat to be hurt, but fat enough to hurt others. And at the rate she was rolling it looked as though she were going to mow down the girls in front. So indeed she would have done had not the warning cry caused them to scatter wildly. Such a noise and commotion could only have one result—the intervention of a mistress. And now a stern voice was heard in the Hall.

"Girls, what is this commotion?"

Miss Bullivant, clapping her hands, swept across the Hall to the staircase, just as Bessie landed with a mighty bump at the foot of the stairs.

"Bessie, you utterly ridiculous girl, get up!" she snapped. "How dare you descend

the stairs in that style! Is this ladylike deportment?"

Bessie Bunter set her glasses straight and blinked.

"I j-jolly well fell!" she said.

"Bessie, get up at once! I suppose you were hurrying to be first in the dining-room?"

"N-not exactly first," said Bessie cautiously. "Sus-second! But they wouldn't let me pass."

"Then you will return to the Fourth Form corridor, and will not enter the dining-room until everyone else in the Form is seated."

"Oh, dear!"

Bessie Bunter, disconsolate, and feeling injured more in mind than in body, wandered back to the Fourth Form corridor. It was amazing that she could possibly feel hungry after her exploits at the dance the previous night; but hungry she was.

Miss Bullivant, although she was not in charge of the Fourth Form, was second in command at Cliff House, and the orders she gave had to be obeyed. Not until the last Fourth Form girl had taken her seat would Bessie be allowed at table. That was certain, for Miss Matthews, the Form-mistress, would naturally support the command.

Hunger perhaps quickening her wits, even Bessie realised that her only chance of being early at the feast was to round up the stragglers; so she went along the Fourth Form corridor to speed them up.

"Dinner, everyone! I say, Flap—Phyllis—hurry up! Dinner!"

Phillipa Derwent and Phyllis Howell, who had stayed behind to finish a story they were reading together, hurried past Bessie, giving her a stray pat.

"Come on, Bessie! Aren't you hungry?"

"Yes, I am; jolly hungry. But I can't start until you're all at the table—the Bull's orders. Do hurry up! Anyone else left?"

They did not answer, being already on the staircase, so Bessie went along the corridor looking into the studies one after another. In point of fact, there was only one girl left behind—Eleanor Lawton.

Bessie did not bother about knocking at doors, contenting herself with pushing open each door, bawling "Dinner!" and looking round. That was her intended procedure with Study No. 11.

But there was a difference. No sooner did she open the door than she saw Eleanor Lawton.

"Oh!" Bessie gasped; then stood and stared.

No wonder, either. For Eleanor Lawton was standing by Sheila's desk. The desk was littered with disturbed papers; but in Eleanor's hand was a piece of cardboard.

"What do you want?" snapped Eleanor. "Go away!"

Bessie Bunter gaped.

"I s-say, I only e-came to ask you to come down to dinner. I e-can't start till you get there. What are you doing with Sheila's desk?"

Bessie was always full of curiosity.

"Mind your own business!"

"That's a photograph you've got!" exclaimed Bessie, as Eleanor moved her hand.

"Get out!" cried Eleanor furiously. "You little spy!"

Bessie jumped back in alarm, terrified by the girl's tone. But Eleanor's manner underwent a sudden change. She was always obeying second thoughts.

"Are you hungry, Bessie?" she asked.

Bessie blinked and stared, quite overcome by the change of manner.

"Well, yes," she admitted. "It's a funny thing, but I am. It's this cold weather, you know."

"How would you like a nice cake?" Eleanor asked, in soothing tones. "Look, such a lovely one!"

And she took from the cupboard a fruit cake that made Bessie's eyes dance—a two-pound fruit cake.

"You—you mean I can have it?" Bessie gasped.

Who had said, she wondered, that the age of miracles was past?

"Of course, if you won't say anything about the accident I've had with Sheila's desk," Eleanor said, holding the cake away from Bessie's hand.

Bessie Bunter breathed hard. She blinked from Eleanor to the grate, where some charred paper lay. Then she looked at the tempting cake. It certainly was a beauty, and she longed to taste it. But why this sudden generosity? Why this bribery, unless Eleanor had something to conceal?

"Take it," urged Eleanor. "But mum's

the word, remember. Don't let anyone know about this. See?"

Then Bessie Bunter drew up. She remembered Eleanor's guilty look when she had pushed open the door, and she tossed her head. Eleanor had insulted her then!

"You can't jolly well bribe me," she said indignantly. "You're doing something you oughtn't to—you're going to burn that photograph. I'll tell Sheila! You can't jolly well bribe me—so there!"

Bessie turned to the door, and Eleanor, suddenly white and frightened, leapt forward and clutched the fat girl's pigtail.

Bessie squealed aloud.

"Help! Ooch!"

Almost in answer to her cry came the sound of running footsteps, and Sheila Wynn herself appeared in the doorway.

"Help!" Bessie wailed. "She's going to burn that photo—"

Eleanor released her grip of Bessie's hair, glanced at Sheila, and—too late—tried to hide that photograph.

Sheila stood still for one horrified second, and then leapt forward.

"Eleanor, give that to me!" she cried in distress. "It is the photograph of my father—the only one I have!"

CHAPTER 10.

Eleanor's Spite.

SHEILA took hold of Eleanor's wrist, and for a second there was a struggle, while Bessie Bunter, tears in her eyes from having her plait pulled, stood and watched them.

"Cat!" she said to Eleanor. "You horrid, spiteful thing!"

Eleanor drew back from Sheila.

"Let go!" she warned.

"Not until I have that photograph. Why," Sheila gasped in surprise, seeing the state of her desk, "you've been routing amongst my things!"

"She has—she has!" Bessie squealed. "She's a spy and a sneak! I'll jolly well pinch her cake!"

Bessie was as good as her word. She was taking Sheila's part in the quarrel, so she took Eleanor's cake. That action momentarily distracted Eleanor's attention and gave time for Sheila to grasp the photograph.

What a struggle ensued then, each hold-

ing a part of it! To and fro, this way and that, while Eleanor, her teeth clenched tight, her lips white with anger, twisted at the photograph.

The struggle could only have one end. The photograph was torn into two!

"Oh, goodness!" cried Sheila, as she stared at the piece in her hand.

It was the lower half of the photograph, showing the uniform tunic only. The head was Eleanor's part—and that part was swiftly consigned to the flames!

"Eleanor! What are you doing? It will burn! Oh, stop!"

Fraughtfully Sheila struggled to reach the fire. If a mistress had seen that struggle she would have been shocked beyond words. But Sheila was fighting with desperation. Already the flames were licking the photograph—and that was the only photograph she possessed of her father!

She must have hurt Eleanor, so tightly did she grip her, but she did not care. Eleanor was merely obstructing the way to the fire, giving the photograph a chance to burn. Only a minute was needed with that fierce fire, and presently Sheila ceased her struggles. The end had come.

The photograph was in flames. The last record of her father's likeness was gone.

"There, that will teach you," Eleanor muttered savagely.

She was herself white with fright, terrified of what she had done, fearful that a report would be made to a mistress.

Sheila, white-faced, drew herself up and looked Eleanor full in the face. Her eyes were flashing, and Eleanor looked away, unable to meet that steady gaze.

"You are the most spiteful, hateful girl I know," she said deliberately. "How could even you do anything so horrid and pointless! It is the only photograph of my father. What good can it do you that it is burned?"

How she would have liked to know the answer to that question! But she did not guess that there was one. Yet Eleanor knew, and a look of cunning came over her face. Even if she were punished she had at least the satisfaction of knowing that it would now be more difficult than ever for Sheila to trace her father.

"Find out!" she snapped, tossing her head.

Sheila turned away, trying to control a trembling lip.

"I came to tell you to come down to dinner," she said. "And that is the last thing I shall ever say to you, Eleanor."

"Good!" said Eleanor, and turned from the door to go down the stairs.

Sheila did not at once follow her. It took some minutes for her to regain her self-control. The photograph was quite gone; all that she had been able to retrieve from the flames was a charred remnant that showed the left ear. The photograph had been taken full face, and she could remember it clearly. But for how long would she be able to recall the likeness?

Now there would not be even that. Her father, who had died so bravely, would remain in name only. What would her mother say? Her mother had a copy, but this was the original. There was at least that copy. Poor mother, she would be so hurt when she knew!

Sheila would have given anything in the world to have had that photograph restored. Almost anything she would rather have lost than that; and Eleanor knew it.

Eleanor! Even the girl's name became something loathsome to Sheila. Never had Sheila known such petty spitefulness; never had she been wilfully injured by another as she had by Eleanor.

The girls must have noticed at dinner-time that something was amiss, but they made no comment, and after dinner, in the interval before the commencement of lessons, Sheila went away by herself.

If Sheila did not mean to tell the story, however, Bessie Bunter did.

Barbara and Mabel, arm-in-arm, were going into Study No. 4 with Bessie Bunter ambling after them, for Bessie shared the study with those two.

"I s-say, Babs," she squealed.

"Sounds like Bessie," said Barbara, winking. "Doesn't it?"

"Almost," admitted Mabel, smiling. "Perhaps she's expecting a remittance, Babs."

"Quite likely," agreed Barbara humorously. "I wonder if she'd like us to cash it in advance."

They exchanged nudges as Bessie put on speed to such an extent that when she caught them up she was utterly breathless.

"Ooch! I s-say, did you offer to cash my remittance, Babs?"

"Well," said Barbara solemnly, "I might, but I'm afraid I haven't got a pound."

"I m-meant ten shillings," said Bessie, holding out her hand.

"Not even ten shillings," said Barbara. "Not even five, Bessie. You see, I don't believe in your remittance."

Bessie Bunter stood and gasped, blinking through thick glasses.

"Oh, really, Babs, I call that mean. Why, you said you'd cash it in advance."

"No, dear, I said I wondered if you wanted it cashed in advance." And Barbara and Mabel went into the study.

For a few moments Bessie stood in the corridor. Then she went into the study.

But just inside she paused and drew up.

There stood Barbara and Mabel, and the looks on their faces were serious indeed. Barbara was wagging her forefinger sternly, Mabel was frowning and shaking her head in a regretful way. Then Barbara pointed to the table.

"Oh!" gasped Bessie. "The k-ake!"

The cake that she had taken from Eleanor's study was on the table, and Barbara addressed her fat friend grimly.

"That is Eleanor's cake," she said. "I saw her buying it."

"Oh, really, I know. But I—I was going to tell you."

"Did you take it from her study?" asked Barbara.

Bessie's conscience had already smitten her for taking that cake, but how tempting it looked! How splendid it would be for tea!

"Y-yes, but she let me take it. You see—"

"What? Eleanor gave you a cake?" laughed Mabel. "Oh, Bessie, how can you fib like that?"

Barbara went to the door, and, looking down the corridor, saw Eleanor just emerging from her study. She called her.

"I say, Eleanor, did you give Bessie a cake of yours?" she asked.

Bessie's squeaking voice came excitedly from inside the study.

"She jolly well did. Babs, I'll tell you all about it. She—"

Eleanor hurried forward, and Barbara flung wide the study door for her. For a moment Eleanor stood there looking from Bessie to the cake. Then she laughed in a rather unnatural way.

"Yes, I did give Bessie the cake," she said. "Anything wrong with it? Bessie did me a little service."

Bessie's jaw dropped.

"Oh, really, you know—I—I—"

Barbara was taken aback.

"Well, as long as you say she can have it," she said. "Sorry, Bessie, I didn't know."

It was so seldom that Bessie was in the right that she drew herself up now and gave a patronising wave of the hand.

"Th-that's all right, Babs," she said airily. "You jumped to conclusions, as usual, instead of taking my word. This is just between me and Eleanor, you know."

Barbara and Mabel exchanged glances, Eleanor gave Bessie a meaning wink, and departed. A second after she had gone Barbara looked at Bessie rather worriedly.

"I don't like your getting in with a girl like Eleanor," she said. "What is all this?"

Bessie put her tongue in her cheek and contorted her face into what she believed was a wink.

"Wouldn't you like to know! But I can jolly well keep a secret—and a cake. He, he, he!"

And not another word did they get out of her.

Perhaps when Bessie had finished the cake her conscience might trouble her, even if her digestion did not; but for the present there was the cake, and, anyway, Sheila could tell what had happened if she wanted to. That was Bessie's way of looking at it.

As for Eleanor, well, she would be paid out for her meanness by losing the marvelous cake. Bessie, as Jimima had once said, could argue black were white if only she thought white were edible!

CHAPTER 11.

The Chance She Wanted.

SHEILA WYNN had never felt so disconsolate in her life as she did during the next day or two. She was a girl who hated scenes, and who had no wish at all to be conspicuous. There were girls in the Form who, when they quarrelled, liked to drag in the whole Form on their side, but Sheila was not one of them.

Of course, the girls did notice how the two girls were separated, and most of them thought that Sheila had not cor-

sidered Eleanor's apology enough, and was sending her to Coventry as well. And that was not considered quite fair.

As for Eleanor, she made the most of the situation, adopting a martyred air, as though she were the injured party. She did not address Sheila when she came into the study; but she took care that it was she who had the study, and Sheila who had to go elsewhere.

Lonelier than ever now—for hitherto she had been able to exchange ordinary remarks with Eleanor, even though that girl had been rather offensively patronising—Sheila turned more than ever for companionship to her mother. She wrote home almost every day, yet kept from her letters any hint of her own unhappiness. Nor did she mention the loss of the photograph. The loss could be better explained in person, she felt.

Many another girl might have unburdened herself to those at home, but Sheila had more consideration for her mother. It was not as though there were anything her mother could do; and, since so much was being sacrificed that she might be a Cliff House girl, surely the least she could do in return was to get every possible advantage from it, and to seem as happy as a girl could be. But what hard work it was keeping a note of misery from the letters.

As for Babs & Co., they were as nice to her as ever. Yet she could not be one of them. She felt that she had to work harder than they, because she was poorer, and games were quite out of the question.

Once they did persuade her to play ping-pong after prep, when Clara had seen her sitting alone in an alcove, and that evening she had enjoyed immensely. After that, Jemima quite often sought her out.

She sought her out on Friday evening when preparation finished. Sheila was reading a book in an alcove near the light, wearing her winter coat to keep her warm, when Jemima found her.

"Cheer-ho!" Jemima said.

Sheila started and looked up, then blushed. Jemima's eyes were twinkling, but it was quite certain that she thought Sheila rather peculiar to be sitting there by herself when she had a study.

"Oh, I didn't hear you come!" said Sheila, smiling.

"No? Too deeply engrossed in the book. Anything thrilling?"

"Not very, but quite interesting. I've read it before, though."

"Then it must be good."

"I haven't any very new ones. Mother gave me this last Christmas. Wasn't it ripping of her? And she couldn't afford it, really, and I know that she had to do without—"

She went crimson with shame, realising that she was "airing poverty."

"Jolly decent," said Jemima. "Mothers are ripping like that; one misses a mother." She frowned. Jemima, like Marjorie, had lost her mother. "But the governor's a ripper. You've met my gov'nor?"

"Yes, I met him at the dance. He's a dear," said Sheila. "He's what I'd like my father to be—you know, something like your father and—and Captain Hargraves."

"Thank you!" smiled Jemima. "I like Captain Hargraves, too. The gov'nor's only known him lately, but they're great pals, and I act as intermediary, y'know. They play chess by post, and I take my father's move to Captain Hargraves. Amazing how he can picture where the pieces are, but he can."

"I should think Captain Hargraves loves it," said Sheila, her eyes gleaming. "Oh, Jemima, how awful to be blind! Isn't there anything I can do at all? If only I could!"

"Why not?" said Jemima. "You could come with me sometimes. How about to-morrow afternoon? Half-holiday. Doing anything?"

"To-morrow? No, not a thing. Oh, Jemima, could I really? It would be so wonderful!"

And then an interruption came.

"Jimmy! That you?"

It was Clara Trevlyn's voice.

"Guilty!" said Jemima. "In the alcove."

Clara came into view with Barbara Redfern, arm-in-arm, as usual.

"There she is," said Clara. "Been dodging us all over the place. Just trying to get out of hockey to-morrow, the slacker!"

"Ahem!" said Jemima. "Sorry, dear children, but hockey's off."

"Hockey's on!" Clara assured her, with a firmness that was typical of her.

When Clara chose to be firm she was decidedly rocklike, and it took a very determined girl to withstand her.

Jemima shook her head.

"Very terrible of me; but, really, I've more or less arranged something else."

"Yes, with Sheila," nodded Clara. "But we're just in time. Sheila, stand by our Form and school, and don't encourage Jimmy in this slackness. We excuse you, even though I don't agree with your slack-ing."

"It really is important," Sheila put in. "I'm going with Jemima to—"

She looked at Jemima, wondering whether it were right to explain.

"To cheer up someone's lonely hours," nodded Jemima, who had not mentioned her mission to Courtfield to the others.

Barbara sighed.

"It's a good cause, but must you both go? Couldn't Sheila go alone?"

It was a point to be considered.

"Or couldn't you bring the lonely person to watch the match?" asked Clara.

"He's blind," said Jemima simply.

"Oh!" said Clara.

"Oh!" said Barbara.

"In that case," demurred Clara, a little crestfallen, "of course—"

"Yes, if that's so, Jimmy," nodded Barbara, "we'll let you off. But we do want you to play, really. We're short."

Jemima polished her monocle.

"If Sheila doesn't mind going," she said. "All will be well. I can explain, and one is enough."

Sheila jumped eagerly at the chance.

"Of course I'll go," she said eagerly. "And Jemima can play hockey."

That was how they settled it, and everyone was perfectly satisfied. Jemima was to play hockey; and, thanks to Sheila, she could do so without "letting down" Captain Hargraves. Of course, Jemima really wanted to play, as Sheila saw, and it was only out of consideration for Captain Hargraves that she had refused.

As for Sheila, although she liked Jemima's company, she felt that it would be nicer to go alone, and to feel that she was not merely an assistant, but a real helper. How splendid to be able to read aloud to Captain Hargraves, perhaps to play to him, for she was no mean pianist.

When Sheila took her book back to her study that evening Eleanor said not a word, but she noticed at once the change

in her enemy. Sheila was looking happy, and she actually hummed a gay little tune to herself. That in itself struck Eleanor as mysterious. But more mystery was to follow.

Only a minute or two after Sheila had put her book away on its shelf, Jemima looked into the study; and she, too, had a book.

"There!" she said. "That's the thing the gov'nor wanted him to read—or be read to, rather. If you wouldn't mind—"

"Oh, Jemima, as if I should mind! Why, I want to. Do I just go to the Little Cottage, and say I've come from you?"

"That's all. Say you are Sheila. Captain Hargraves knows your name. I told him when I went to see him, y'know, after"—Jemima glanced at Eleanor, who was pretending to be reading, yet obviously all ears—"after the little business of the other day," she added.

"Oh, I see! Thank you awfully, Jemima! You don't know how happy I shall be to help him. As my own father was—was killed in the War, naturally, I want to do all I can to help others who were maimed."

Eleanor pricked up her ears, but cunningly turned over a page of her book, as though she were reading deeply. But as no girl could really have read with that discussion going on, the pretence was a little transparent. Not that Sheila cared, however; it was nothing to do with Eleanor.

"Good for you," nodded Jemima. "It's rather a tough case, because he has lost his memory. He can remember nothing that happened before the time he was blown up and blinded."

Jemima went shortly afterwards, and Sheila only stayed a few minutes. When she had gone, Eleanor put down her book, and her face was quite pale.

Captain Hargraves had been badly wounded in the War—had lost his memory. At once the idea came into her head that it seemed he might be Sheila's father. And Sheila did not know.

But Sheila was going there. She might find out the truth, if such were the truth, and then what would happen?

In a panic, Eleanor jumped up from her chair.

Sheila must be prevented from going to the village! Captain Hargraves must be

turned from her. In some way the two must be kept apart.

But how? Locking Sheila in would not do. Could she be kept in—detained by a mistress? Could she be blamed by Miss Bullivant for something? Miss Bullivant was always keeping girls in.

And could she go in Sheila's place? Captain Hargraves was blind; he would not be able to see the difference.

Feverishly the ideas ran through Eleanor's mind as she paced up and down the study. How the two were to be kept apart she did not know; but somehow they must be, if her own ends were to be served. And to Eleanor they alone mattered.

Somehow she must manage to keep Captain Hargraves and Sheila apart!

CHAPTER 12.

Impending Disaster.

IT did not occur to Sheila, as she got together her books in the study the next morning, that Eleanor was planning to upset her schemes for that afternoon. Yet, knowing Eleanor, she might have guessed as much; for had not Eleanor announced herself as Sheila's sworn enemy?

The girls did not exchange a word, even though they had occasion to stand close together at the bookcase, and could have performed the task more simply and efficiently if speech had been possible. Sheila had to walk around the table to get a book which Eleanor could have passed her. Even Eleanor waited until Sheila had taken her arm from a book before reaching for it.

Not a moment longer than necessary did Sheila wait in the study, but hurried out into the corridor.

Lessons were almost due to begin, and there was a scene of much bustling in the Fourth Form corridor. Girls, as usual, had left everything until the last minute, though, as Miss Matthews had pointed out on numerous occasions, there was ample time between breakfast and lessons for girls to have books ready, fountain-pens filled, pencils sharpened, etc. But the girls would have none of it. It was not until the bell was ringing that a girl found her pen had no ink in it, her pencil lacked a point, and

that a Latin grammar was lost, stolen, or strayed.

Consequently, Barbara Redfern, who was captain of the Fourth Form at Cliff House School, was crawling over the floor, looking for the pencil-sharpener, while Mabel Lynn was hunting high and low for her algebra book.

As for Study No. 7, when Sheila went along to see if Jenima & Co. were ready, it really seemed as though a tornado had struck the place and then reluctantly given ground of place to an earthquake.

"Ink! Ink!" cried Clara, in exasperation. "Not a drop in the giddy study anywhere!"

"Plenty on the wall, beloved!" said Jenima.

"And on the carpet!" sighed Marjorie, "and the tablecloth."

"It isn't a joke!" Clara groaned. "First lesson is maths, and that means the Bull. You know what she'll say if I let on that my pen is empty. She's so unreasonable."

"She might say, 'Use the ink well,'" murmured Marjorie.

"Well, so I would, only I stuffed it up with blotting-paper, and I put some carbide in yours the other day. Bother! It is a nuisance. No ink!"

"Cheer up!" exclaimed Sheila, remembering. "I can get you some. There's half a bottle in my desk. I shan't be a moment, Clara."

"Hurrah! Good for you!" cried Clara, and gave her a slap on the back. "You're more use to a girl in distress than these two, anyway."

Sheila hurried off, while Marjorie, sighing, replaced the things which Clara had moved in the search for ink.

Although Eleanor was in the corridor Sheila did not give her a thought, yet she had overheard all that had passed in Study No. 7; for there was a possibility that Jenima and Sheila might have more to say regarding the arrangement for that afternoon!

But when she heard that Sheila was going for ink she was equally interested, and followed her enemy down the stairs.

They were the only two girls going down; for the others never dreamed of going until the bell rang—and usually not until it had stopped ringing. It was almost a point of honour not to do so.

Sheila, losing no time, hurried to her desk, flung it open, and brought out the small, half-full bottle of ink. She held a

up and looked at it with satisfaction. There would be ample there for Clara.

She had left the Form-room door open, and as she did not expect anyone to be in the corridor she went out with a rush.

Someone was in the corridor, however—Eleanor—and they met in a collision.

"Oh!"

"Ah! The ink bottle flew from Sheila's hand, while she, more astonished than hurt, staggered back, Eleanor, more prepared, just recoiled.

"You clumsy duffer!" snapped Eleanor furiously.

Sheila struggled to her feet.

"I'm sorry!" she said briefly.

When she saw the ink on the wall she was indeed sorry. She was horror-stricken. It was not so much that the ink was gone, as that the wall was stained. But what would Miss Bullivant say to that?

"Oh, dear! I must get a duster!" she gasped.

Snatching up the bottle, she fled; and as she did so the bell for lessons rang. In a moment Miss Bullivant would be upon the scene!

Although that likelihood disturbed Sheila considerably, Eleanor gave a little smile. That collision had not been at all the accident that it had seemed to Sheila. It had been planned. Naturally the chances were a hundred to one that the ink would be spilled; and it was certain that Miss Bullivant would be annoyed when she discovered the spilled ink. The incensing of Miss Bullivant by an action of Sheila's was Eleanor's object.

In a moment or two Miss Bullivant's sharp cough was heard, and Eleanor, as soon as she knew that the mistress had turned into the corridor, emerged from the Form-room, into which she had hurried as soon as Sheila had disappeared.

Miss Bullivant was looking grim. She always did. There was a hard set about her mouth, and a constant, determined gleam in her eyes which was magnified by the pince-nez she wore.

Naturally she saw the ink. If there had only been a tiny spot on the ceiling Miss Bullivant would have seen it.

"Good gracious!" she said.

"What a mess!" said Eleanor, in the ingratiating voice she used when in company of mistresses.

"A mess indeed!" Miss Bullivant agreed, with asperity. "Is this your handiwork?"

"Oh, Miss Bullivant, no!"

"Then who did it?"

Miss Bullivant's was not a soft voice, and it carried well enough for other girls to hear. Already the warning had gone forth that the Bull was "at large," and the girls, not wanting punishment for being late, were hurrying down. There were some of them in the corridor already.

"I—I would rather not say, Miss Bullivant!" muttered Eleanor, and hung her head.

Miss Bullivant arched her brows.

"What? What? How dare you! This is sheer impertinence!"

The other girls, awed by the mistress' anger, drew up, exchanging glances. Some of them knew who was responsible, for Sheila, returning to the corridor, had made no secret of the fact that she had spilled ink and wanted a duster.

No other mistress would have made a girl sneak; but Miss Bullivant differed in many ways from other mistresses.

"I—I—it was one of the girls," said Eleanor.

Clara whispered to Barbara.

"My hat! Fancy Eleanor shielding Sheila!"

"Yes; she can't be as bad as she seems."

At that moment Sheila came hurrying through the crowd with a duster, and, seeing the mistress, stopped short in dismay.

"Oh, dear!" she said.

Miss Bullivant eyed her coldly.

"Ah, Sheila—the culprit? You spilled this ink!"

Sheila flashed a look at Eleanor. Her first thought was that Eleanor had sneaked.

"Yes, I did. It was an accident, Miss Bullivant. It fell."

"Indeed! Then wipe it up with that duster, and take fifty lines for carelessness."

Fifty lines! A stern enough punishment; but not as stern as Eleanor had intended, and she looked quite crestfallen. Those fifty lines would not keep Sheila in during the afternoon, of course.

What did please Eleanor was the look that Barbara and one or two of the others gave her. For naturally they thought that she had been unusually sporting in not giving Sheila away.

"Tough luck, Sheila!" whispered Clara, who had been able to fill her pen with what had been left in the bottle. "I ought to do those lines for you!"

"Silence!" Miss Bullivant snapped.

"You are in the Form-room now, Clara.

To your places, girls, and quickly. Sheila is not in need of your assistance."

There were many spots to be wiped off, and really a little assistance would not have been out of place. Even though she hurried Sheila could not please Miss Bullivant, who further rated her for having taken such a time over the task.

"However, get to your place, Sheila, and another time learn to be more careful. The carelessness of you girls is really staggering. The girls of to-day seem to be utterly incapable of controlling their movements!" Miss Bullivant rapped on. "Bessie Bunter, twenty lines for chewing sweets in class!"

There was a faint giggle then as Bessie Bunter protested that she had not been eating a sweet at all; but the "East wind" look the mistress gave the Form brought silence.

"Do not argue with me, Bessie!"

"But it's no-not fair. It wasn't a s-sweet at all. It was a bit of biscuit!" gasped Bessie, aggrieved by such gross injustice.

The Bull's eyes glittered.

"Fifty lines, Bessie. If there is any more laughter you girls will be detained!"

Miss Bullivant was in a right royal rage by this time, and the girls settled in their desks, and sought to look really intelligent, peek, and very mild.

But the mistress was in just the mood that suited Eleanor's purpose. If only Sheila could be made to offend the mistress in some way—then surely she would be gated!

Sheila, however, was a model of attention and good behaviour, and Eleanor found no way of spoiling that conduct except by running the risk herself of being gated.

At the end of the lesson Miss Bullivant gave a warning.

"I shall expect the lines I have given to be finished before girls are free for the afternoon!"

Then Eleanor gave a little purr of satisfaction and rubbed her hands.

The rest of the morning lesson, with Miss Matthews in charge, passed off smoothly enough, and in the interval Sheila attacked her punishment, putting the unfinished sheet of foolscap back in her desk. Directly the bell rang to terminate the morning work, Sheila finished the lines, and then hurried them to Miss Bullivant's study.

Miss Bullivant, as they all knew, was

engaged with the Sixth Form, and so would not be in her study.

"Good for you!" said Jemima, as Sheila returned and told them that the lines were done.

"Weight off my mind!" Sheila agreed.

There would have been a weight on her mind instead, had she but known of Eleanor's plan!

CHAPTER 13.

Eleanor to Blame!

"BUCK up, Jimmy! Don't stand there talking!" called Clara Trevlyn.

"Come on, Jemima!" urged Barbara.

The Fourth Form hockey team and followers were crowding in and about the motor-coach that was taking the girls away to play their match against Danesford Hall. It was, as may be imagined, a happy and light-hearted crowd. Freda Foote was tooting the horn to wake up Jemima; and Clara Trevlyn was rattling hockey-sticks with Mabel Lynn.

Jemima Carstairs, however, was talking to Sheila.

"That's O.K.," she added, waving to her friends. "Good-bye, Sheila! I must leave you—here—who—"

Clara and Barbara, exasperated at being kept waiting, had rushed up and caught Jemima. Clara put a throttling grip on Jemima's blue-and-white scarf, and Barbara more gently took her arm.

"Walk or be dragged!" said Clara. "Which?"

"Ugh—ooh—ugh!" gasped Jemima, staggering.

"Please yourself!" said Clara cheerfully. "I'm bringing Jemima's scarf, girls, and she can come with it if she likes."

As the scarf was bound round Jemima's neck she had really very little choice in the matter. She went, to the accompaniment of cheers from the waiting team, while Sheila, a book under her arm, waved good-bye.

Because she had something definite to do that afternoon she did not so much miss going with them all. But usually how she longed that she might be a member of the team! Sometimes she had accompanied the girls and cheered, but that was not so much fun as playing, of course. And then the opponents could not be expected to provide

a tea for spectators, which meant buying tea out—always rather expensive.

Now the crowd in the motor-coach settled down. They were just about to give the signal to go, when there came a wild squeal from the direction of the schoolhouse.

"W-wait for m-me, girls! Here I am—Ooch!"

There she was—fat Bessie Bunter—sprawled full length on the path, and she grunted and wheezed as Sheila helped her to her feet. Bessie was wearing her thick coat and at least three scarves, while she carried a worn hockey-stick. But what caused a perfect shriek of laughter from the girls was the fact that a pair of shinguards adorned the fat girl's legs.

"Oh, my hat!" said Clara. "She thinks there's going to be a real bun-fight. Kick as kick can!"

"W-wait for me, girls. I'm going to cheer you on; and, besides, Babs said I was tenth reserve."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"N-nothing to jolly well laugh at! I've done my lines for the Bull, you know. What do you think the old cat said to me?"

"Shush! Look out!" warned Barbara.

"Oh, really!" protested Bessie. "The blessed Bull—"

"Hurrah!"

Bessie's definition of Miss Bullivant was drowned in cheers, as the motor-coach startled; and Miss Bullivant, who had a moment before emerged from the school-house doorway, looked after it grimly. She really looked in half a mind to call it back; but the cheering would have prevented anyone hearing if she had. Hence the cheers.

However, there was Sheila!

"Sheila!" snapped Miss Bullivant.

Sheila had tactfully feigned to ignore the mistress's presence, and she turned now, wondering if she were going to take some of the anger which had been Bessie's due.

"Yes, Miss Bullivant," she said.

"Why are you dressed for outdoors?"

Sheila stared. What a question!

"Because I am going out, Miss Bullivant," she said, hoping that that simple statement would not be interpreted as insolence.

"Indeed? And did I not expressly state that you were not to go until the lines had been done?"

"Y-yes," said Sheila wonderingly, "But I did the lines. They're on your study table."

"What? You have the impertinence to

pretend that you have done the lines and put them in my study?"

"Why, yes. I put them there before dinner, Miss Bullivant. I can show you just where."

Miss Bullivant gave her a keen, steely look, and then with a command to her to follow, turned back to the schoolhouse and led the way in. Sheila, rather dismayed and perplexed, reached the mistress's corridor, and entered Miss Bullivant's study almost on the mistress's heels.

"Now search—and without unduly disturbing whatever else is there."

Sheila turned over the papers on the desk. But there was, naturally enough, no sign at all of her lines. The more she searched the more bewildered she became.

"But—but I know I put them here. Really, I did, Miss Bullivant!" she protested. "I—I cannot understand it!"

Miss Bullivant answered in grinding tones:

"If you put the lines there, then there they would still be. They cannot have walked; they cannot have blown away; and it is quite certain that they are not of sufficient value or general interest to be stolen."

"No, Miss Bullivant."

Sheila's mind was in a whirl. She simply could not understand where the lines could have gone.

"Then what is your explanation?"

"I put the lines there," Sheila pointed to the desk. "I do not know where they are now, though."

Miss Bullivant breathed hard.

"I'm sorry to say that I cannot believe you," she said icily.

"But, Miss Bullivant," Sheila gasped, "I can prove it. Several of the girls saw me writing the lines; and I told them I had put them in your study."

"If you have evidence, produce it."

The girls were gone!

"They—they're out of the school—in the motor-coach, Miss Bullivant."

"Ah, I see! Well, I am not satisfied. Go to the Form-room and write out the fifty lines, Sheila."

There was a sound of hurried movement in the corridor, but Sheila did not notice it. Even if she had, she would have guessed that it was Eleanor Lawton anxiously overhearing what was passing.

Eleanor was on the staircase when Sheila went on her way down to the Form-room. Sheila, although she felt that she had been

unjustly treated, could see Miss Bullivant's point of view. There was no proof that the lines had been done. Miss Matthews, of course, would have accepted Sheila's word; but even Sheila herself could not imagine what had happened to the lines.

When she saw Eleanor, however, a sudden suspicion entered her head. There was something rather peculiar in the look that girl gave her, and she paused.

"Eleanor," she said grimly.

Eleanor did not even turn her head, but walked on. Sheila, however, caught her arm angrily. Thoughts ran rapidly through her mind. The lines could not have vanished; therefore, someone had removed them. And who would do that save from some spiteful motive? Who would be so spiteful but Eleanor, her avowed enemy?

So it was that Sheila, angry now, and determined to thrash the matter out, caught hold of Eleanor's arm.

"Oh, oh!" cried Eleanor loudly.

Sheila, in astonishment, released her grip. "Why, I—I didn't hurt you!" she protested.

"Oh, you have twisted my arm!" exclaimed Eleanor loudly.

In a moment Miss Bullivant was on the scene.

"What is the meaning of this?" she demanded angrily.

"I took hold of Eleanor's arm," said Sheila; "but—"

"She snatched at it as I was passing her!" Eleanor moaned, making a grimace and moving her arm as though it pained her.

Miss Bullivant pointed down the stairs.

"Your lines are doubled, Sheila. Go to the Form-room at once!"

Sheila gave Eleanor a bitter look, and then without another word went down the stairs. Where she had only suspected before, now she was sure that Eleanor was the cause of the missing lines; for it was obvious that Eleanor had cried out not because of the pain but in order to bring Miss Bullivant on to the scene. The malicious triumph in her glance was evidence of that.

There was clearly nothing to be done, however, but the lines; and Sheila, in angry mood, entered the Form-room. It was not until she had seated herself at the desk that she noticed on the board a chalk drawing.

"Oh, goodness!" she gasped in horror.

For that drawing was a gross caricature of Miss Bullivant.

At once Sheila knew that she would be accused of drawing it should the mistress come into the Form-room, as she surely would. At once Sheila grabbed the duster to erase that offensive sketch.

Miss Bullivant was depicted crudely, but her long nose, her untidy hair, and the thinness of legs, compared with the largeness of feet, showed clearly whom it was meant to represent.

Alas! It was not Sheila's lucky afternoon, or else there was more conspiracy. For no sooner had she found the duster and rubbed out the feet than the door opened and Miss Bullivant entered.

Frantically Sheila endeavoured to complete the erasure, yet knowing that it was hopeless and that her fate was sealed.

"Stop!"

Miss Bullivant marched up to the dais, her eyes glittering. There she paused, staring at what remained of the caricature.

"I didn't draw it, Miss Bullivant," Sheila protested. "I found it on the board."

She had suffered enough for other girls' faults; and this was the end. It might seem sneaking or not. She did not care. If she were blamed for this she would be gated for the whole afternoon. And then what of Captain Hargraves, waiting patiently for a book and some entertainment?

"You did not draw it? Someone drew it and left it there for you to be blamed for it?" Miss Bullivant said.

Sheila gave a little gasp.

"My goodness! Yes, that is most likely," she agreed.

Miss Bullivant gave a short, harsh laugh.

"Indeed? You appear to be quite a shuttlecock of fate, Sheila. Someone takes your lines, someone plans to get you punished. Most remarkable!" Then her tone changed. "Go to your desk, wretched girl!" she snapped furiously. "And stay there for the rest of the afternoon. After you have finished the lines you will continue with the exercises in factors we were doing this morning."

"Miss Bullivant! But I must go out—I have an appointment!" cried Sheila in distress.

"Not another word! Go to your desk!"

Miss Bullivant picked up the duster and wiped the caricature completely from the board. Then she flung down the duster and marched to the doorway.

Sheila turned to her desk, and, too angry for tears, sat down and took out some paper. But she did not start work. The door closed upon Miss Bullivant and Sheila sat there, frowning.

Captain Hargraves was expecting her—expecting someone to read to him. There was no means of sending a message, and Jemima had gone with the team. What would he think, waiting there by himself, disappointed and hurt?

Yet what was the alternative? To break detention!

The mere thought of that made Sheila shudder. Break detention indeed! Dare she? To break detention, or to let Captain Hargraves down?

There seemed only one answer to that, and, trembling with suppressed excitement, she took up her pen. She would write fifty lines and no more; then she would go!

It was a desperate plan, Sheila realised that to break detention was a very serious offence, and would probably entail heavy punishment if she were caught. But when she remembered Captain Hargraves, all thought of her own possible punishment vanished.

Her pen moving rapidly, she settled down at the desk, not even bothering to remove her hat and coat; and while she, thus busied herself, Eleanor Lawton, humming a little tune, took a last look at herself in the mirror before setting out for Friardale—and Captain Hargraves.

CHAPTER 14. The Pendant!

ELEANOR LAWTON felt a thrill of excitement as she set out for Friardale. She considered that she had been very clever indeed, and rather wished that she could tell others all about it. What a schemer she was, she told herself. First, she had managed the business of borrowing her mother's diamond pendant, without anyone at home guessing that it was gone. And then, having lost it, had successfully hushed matters up.

Of course, Sheila knew that the pendant was lost; it was unfortunate, too, that she had shown it to her; but on the other hand it had been very pleasant to see how astonished Sheila had been, and how deeply admiring of a girl who could afford such a

thing. At least, that was how it seemed to Eleanor that Sheila felt.

She had been rather clever, too, she thought, in the way in which she had managed things regarding Sheila. She had found out that she was almost certainly Sheila's cousin, but she had not yet heard of that truth being suspected by Sheila.

And now—well, now, Eleanor was going to put an end to Sheila's visit to Captain Hargraves. She was not sure that Captain Hargraves was Sheila's father; it was just a rather wild guess, but she meant to be on the safe side.

She reached Friardale in good time, and then commenced the task of finding the Little Cottage. She went at once to the post office, for naturally they would know the whereabouts of all the houses in the district.

"There is no Little Cottage here," said the woman in charge.

"But Captain Hargraves lives there," Eleanor said, in the lofty and rather patronising tone she used towards people she imagined to be her inferiors. "You had better look it up again."

The woman gave Eleanor a grim look.

"There is no need," she said curtly. "There is no Captain Hargraves in Friardale."

Then Eleanor had a shock. Friardale? Had anything been said about Friardale? Was it perhaps Courtfield? Of a sudden she saw that she had not really managed this affair with her usual skill and cunning! She had jumped to conclusions.

"Oh, I see!" she said, and swept from the shop without so much as a "Thank you!" The woman in the shop could no longer be of service to her, so Eleanor simply obliterated her from her mind.

Of course, she now blamed Sheila. Why hadn't Sheila said Courtfield in the first place? Just like Sheila, of course, being secretive!

As she walked to the station Eleanor wondered how it was that Sheila knew Captain Hargraves. He was a friend of Jemima's father; but Sheila had met him recently, it seemed. Well, that would soon be settled. Sheila did not know him well—he did not know Sheila well. If she called herself Sheila and made herself a nuisance Sheila would not be asked again!

Eleanor turned towards the station, walking easily, humming to herself with satisfaction. She bought her ticket, and then wandered up and down the platform waiting for the train.

One or two other people came through the booking office from time to time, but Eleanor gave them scant attention. Sheila was the only person she did not want to see; and Sheila, as she knew perfectly well, was now in detention, owing to that caricature. Eleanor had made sure of that before departing.

And then, whelching to walk down the platform, she suddenly stopped dead, her face paling.

Hurrying through the booking hall on to the platform was Sheila Wynn!

At the same moment Sheila saw Eleanor. She paused and stared at Eleanor, and then frowned.

Sheila out of detention! Had Miss Bullivant let her off, Eleanor wondered. Had the truth been discovered that it was she who had taken those lines and drawn the caricature on the board?

Eleanor, in a sudden panic, walked down the platform; but Sheila took not the slightest notice of her.

Eleanor it was who had put the bar of silence between them, and it was she who now wanted to lift it. But Sheila deliberately looked away as Eleanor came abreast of her.

It seemed impossible to Eleanor that any girl would dare to break detention; so that Sheila simply must have been excused. But why, unless the truth had come out? She became quite agitated with fright.

The train came in, and Eleanor made for her first class compartment with as much ostentation as she could, and then looked back to see Sheila clamber into a compartment marked "3." But there was little satisfaction in that, compared with the uneasiness that assailed her.

Sheila had already guessed Eleanor's state of mind, and sure as she was that it was Eleanor who had drawn the caricature and planned to have her detained, she knew that Eleanor must be wondering how things had gone wrong. She did not intend enlightening her.

Why had Eleanor planned to have her detained? Was it merely spite, or was it to prevent her keeping this appointment?

And why was Eleanor going to Courtfield?

Only at Courtfield could that be discovered; and Sheila realised then that Eleanor would either await her at the station, or follow her to her destination. Purposely she took a roundabout route to the Little Cottage, and on the way she paused for a moment outside a large shop.

There were four entrances and exits to the immense shop, and Sheila, with an impish smile, marched in, knowing that Eleanor would either await her exit or follow at a discreet distance.

In the shop Sheila wandered from department to department, and then out at another exit. There was no sign of Eleanor. She had been shaken off.

It did not take Sheila long to reach the Little Cottage, and the housekeeper welcomed her in, smiling.

"You're Jemima Carstairs' friend?" she asked.

"Yes, I'm Sheila."

"Captain Hargraves is expecting you. What a lovely afternoon, isn't it? This way!"

Sheila was shown into a charming little sitting-room. Captain Hargraves was seated at a table near the fire, typewriting slowly and cautiously, his dark-rimmed glasses glinting in the firelight.

"Hallo! Who is this?" he said.

The firelight lit up his handsome face in profile. It was a rather careworn face, and his hair was greying; but that only increased Sheila's sympathy. What a decepted, pleasant voice he had!

In a moment she was chatting, quite at her ease. Captain Hargraves showed her his typewriter, and then asked her to check what he had typewritten.

"Just a story," he said. "An historical romance. Dull?"

But Sheila found it thrilling, and said so.

"Do go on, please," she urged. "It's so thrilling. I want to know what happened. Is the man found hiding in the trees, and does his horse get caught again or run right away?"

Captain Hargraves laughed.

"We shall have to wait and see what happens in the next chapter," he said.

"We'll write it together, shall we? You say what you would like to happen and then we'll see what happens when we start

typewriting. But now—the book. I've heard good reports of this. It may seem dull to you, and if it does, just stop reading. Most uncommonly good of you to come and read to me."

The book was about Ancient Egypt, and didn't seem really dull. She read carefully while Captain Hargraves smoked and made occasional comments. Then tea came in and proved a very jolly, happy meal. She was rather surprised to find how happy Captain Hargraves seemed to be.

"I am enjoying myself," she said. "So I do hope I'm not boring you."

"You're a little brick, Sheila!" he said. "A real little brick! And you must come again, please. A nice name, Sheila, too. It seems to strike some chord in my memory—" He clasped his forehead, and a strained look came over his face.

The nurse-housekeeper who was busy removing the tea-things, gave Sheila a quick look and shook her head.

"How do you like school?" she asked quickly, obviously anxious to change the subject.

Captain Hargraves gave up his attempt to solve the riddle of the name that was locked with other mysteries in his numb memory. They talked of Cliff House, and she told stories of Bessie Bunter and Jemima, of Clara and Barbara, and the others, so that time passed rapidly.

Very soon it was time to be back at school again. She was alone with the housekeeper for a moment, and received a warning.

"Don't let Captain Hargraves worry about his memory. If he tries to recall things it upsets him that he can't. You'll remember, dear?"

"Oh, yes, of course!" said Sheila. "It must be very awful not remembering. I'm so sorry. But isn't he a dear? He seems so happy always."

Then Captain Hargraves himself came into the little hall where the two were standing.

"Oh, Sheila," he said, "I'd like to make you a little gift—just as a token of thanks for what you did the other day! I know you don't want any reward; but I want you to have it."

Sheila hardly knew what to say then; but if she was at the moment tongue-tied she was dumbfounded a moment later.

"A little trinket," said Captain Har-

graves, and held up something that flashed when it caught the light. "It feels like a pendant."

Sheila's eyes widened as she saw the beautiful little piece of jewellery; she stared at it, utterly bereft of speech. For the thing that he held in his hand was Eleanor's lost pendant!

"Like it?" he asked, smiling at her. "I came across it the other day. There my dear, take it; it is yours!"

And, so saying, he thrust it into her hand.

CHAPTER 15.

Worse and Worse!

SHEILA stared at the pendant in her hand, not knowing what to say. She was conscious, too, how strange it must seem that she was silent. The housekeeper had gone, and there was no one to see her confusion. But did Captain Hargraves guess?

"You like it?" he asked her.

Naturally she liked it. Who could help liking such a beautiful thing?

"Oh, yes, I like it! I think it's wonderful. But—" She faltered. "It's awfully valuable."

"And the service you rendered me was valuable. The most valuable service anyone can render. Take that little pendant, my dear. You like it now, but you may like it even better when you are older."

"Thank you. I—I'm sure I shall."

Oh, how she longed to ask questions! There was no mistaking the fact that it was the same pendant as the one that Eleanor had lost. How, then, had Captain Hargraves obtained it?

"You're too kind," she began, "and—"

"Nonsense! It is you who are kind. I cannot tell you how much I appreciate the fact that you have given up a sunny afternoon to sit and read to me when you might have been playing games and enjoying yourself."

"I may come again?" she asked. "It isn't a sacrifice; it—it's a privilege."

"Come as often as you can spare the time," he said. "We are going to be great friends."

The pendant clutched tightly in her hand, Sheila went back to the station thinking over again all that had hap-

opened that afternoon. What a splendid story it was he had been writing; how nice it was in the little warm sitting-room reading to him!

But as soon as she reached the station she remembered the awful truth. She had broken detention. At Cliff House Miss Bullivant would be waiting for her. She tried to assure herself that the punishment would be a few hundred lines, yet at the back of her mind was the fear that it might indeed be more.

To break bounds! To defy, of all mistresses, Miss Bullivant! Surely there would be a very heavy bill to pay for that!

In supposing that there was excitement on her account at Cliff House, Sheila had not judged amiss. There was a hunt all over the school for her!

Miss Bullivant had indeed issued orders to Piper, the school porter, to the servants, and to such girls as she saw, that Sheila, on her return to school, was to be sent to her.

Eleanor Lawton, who happened to be in Hall, was questioned.

"Eleanor, have you seen Sheila this afternoon since the moment when you were quarrelling?"

"Quarrelling?" said Eleanor, in gentle reproof. "Oh, Miss Bullivant, I wasn't quarrelling—"

"Never mind whether you were or not," Miss Bullivant snapped. "You know to what occasion I am referring. Have you seen her since?"

"Well, I—"

"Answer me."

"Yes, I saw her in Courtfield, going into a shop."

"Courtfield! Ah! Very well, if you see her send her to me at once, Eleanor. She has deliberately broken detention—"

It was then past tea-time, and the hockey team was returning from the match full of good cheer, for Cliff House had been victorious. As they all crowded excitedly into Hall, Miss Bullivant was on the stairs, and, turning, she descended.

Bessie Bunter, unwrapping her scarf, did a little dance.

"It's all right, Miss Bullivant!" she said exultantly.

Miss Bullivant had only one idea in mind—the missing Sheila.

"Ah, she has returned!"

"Oh, really, nun-no! But we won!" said Bessie. "Three-tut-two, Miss Bulli-

vant. Clara was just racing down the field li-like this—" Bessie snatched Clara's hockey stick, and, raising it to give a demonstration, caught Mabel Lynn on the head.

"Ooooh!" gasped Mabel.

"Bessie!" cried Miss Bullivant.

"The bub-ball was at her foot," went on Bessie, in shrill excitement, "and a girl was coming across, so I kik-called out: 'Look out, Clara!' like that, only louder—"

"Bessie Bunter, go to the Form-room and stay there—stay there!" thundered Miss Bullivant. "Go!"

Bessie Bunter went, looking very crest-fallen, and Miss Bullivant turned to the others.

"The rest of you will disperse quietly. Have any of you seen Sheila Wynn? She has broken detention this afternoon."

They stared at Miss Bullivant in dismay! It was news to them that she had been gated.

"Sheila?" said Barbara, who was captain of the Fourth Form at Cliff House.

"Oh, but was she gated?"

"Should I be likely to say that she was if she were not?" demanded the mistress heatedly. "Really, you girls, you are too trying. If you see Sheila tell her to report to me at once. Now go!"

The girls hurriedly went, with Miss Bullivant in such a mood that they had no wish to linger in her company.

"Phew! Someone's been waving a red rag at her!" said Clara in dismay. "Poor old Bessie!"

The girls mounted the stairs, and the jubilation they had felt at their victory rather evaporated. Jemima dropped into the armchair in the study rather weakly, Clara lolled against the wall, and Marjorie sighed.

"Poor old Sheila," said Barbara sadly. "Too bad!"

"Yes, Sheila was being a good Samaritan," Jemima nodded. "Poor old Sheila. But what a brick, you know, risking the Bull's wrath to do someone a service!"

For a while the match was discussed, and then Jemima went downstairs to look for Sheila. She felt, in a way, that she was to blame for this state of affairs, although it could hardly be laid at her door that Sheila had been gated. Nor could Jemima understand how that had happened. Sheila was not a girl who was

often in the mistress' black books. She worked hard.

Jemima had been waiting for nearly twenty minutes, when Sheila at last came through the gloom.

"Choor-ho!" said Jemima. "I say, we've just heard what a first-rate heroine you are, braving the Bull's wrath and all that. Good for you!"

Sheila's smile was wan.

"Oh, you've heard! There's a hue and cry, then?"

"A hue, and loud, whooping cries. I'm rather afraid the Bull is in a rip-snorting mood. Sorry! Anything I can do?"

"Nothing. But it's nice of you to worry, Jemima. Captain Hargraves was quite pleased to see me, I think. I read to him, and he's writing the most thrilling story—"

They walked to the staircase, talking of that story, and then Sheila halted and grimaced.

"Um! I think I'll go along to the study, and take my hat and coat off first," she said.

Feeling very agitated, Sheila went in to her study. Eleanor was there, waiting for her, a look of triumph on her face. She was having a lonely tea with a well-spread table.

"Miss Bullivant wants you," she said coldly.

Sheila, wondering frantically what she could do with the pendant, took off her coat and then, hanging it on the peg behind the door, slipped the pendant into her pocket.

Alas, the pendant dropped to the floor. What, in her excitement, she had thought was the pocket, was the belt.

The pendant lay upon the carpet for a moment, catching the rays from the lamp. And that second was enough! With a wild cry Eleanor sprang upon her chair.

"You thief!"

CHAPTER 16. The Duplicate.

"YOU thief!"

Eleanor's face was white, and her eyes gleaming as she snatched up the pendant from the floor a moment before Sheila could act.

The two girls faced each other tensely.

It had troubled Sheila all the way home to know what to do with the pendant, and

what she would say if Eleanor should find it before the decision had been made? And now Eleanor had discovered it!

"That is not your pendant," Sheila said.

"It—it—"

"It's yours," jeered Eleanor, and laughed. "Oh, my dear, don't be funny! How could this be yours? Why, it's worth pounds and pounds! My mother—my mother bought it for me! Really, yours indeed! Do you suggest there may be two exactly like this?"

Sheila, quite pale, her hands clenched, nodded her head.

"Yes, I do suggest that there may be two. After all, why should there be only one like it?"

"Then where did you get it?" sneered Eleanor. "Funny you haven't had it before, isn't it? Really, I must say that's strange, you know. And let me tell you this—this pendant was once an ear-ring. It belonged to my grandmother. You can really see if you look—"

Before Sheila could argue further the door was pushed open so suddenly that she staggered, and Barbara Redfern, with an unusually grave face, looked into the study.

"Oh, here you are!" she said. "I say, Sheila, trouble brewing. The Bull's hunting for you. Sorry, but she wants to see you instanter."

Sheila nodded her head, and then, deciding that the issue of the pendant would have to be deferred, she opened the door wider.

"Thank you, Barbara, I'm going now," she said quietly. "Wish me luck!"

Barbara flashed a look from Sheila to Eleanor, noting the signs of a quarrel, but said nothing about it.

"Of course I do; we all do."

Sheila went her way, trying to look as though she did not mind facing the Bull. But everyone knew that she really did. Who, after all said and done, did not?

Miss Bullivant was in her study correcting exercises and snorting in annoyance at mistakes. The girls whose misfortune it was to have their work corrected on this night would find that red ink had not been spared. Red ink was always a symptom of rage with Miss Bullivant, and her pen was kept busy.

When Sheila entered, however, she did not even look up. She went on with her correcting until the particular book was finished.

Sheila looked about the room idly, noting its severity, and then was brought to attention.

"Well, so you have been good enough to return, Sheila?"

Miss Bullivant's glittering eyes were upon her.

"Yes, Miss Bullivant. I'm sorry that

"Sorry, nonsense! You deliberately broke detention?"

"Yes; I did the fifty lines."

"And did I not double those lines and order you to stay in detention?"

"Yes, Miss Bullivant," quavered Sheila, knowing that she was quite in the wrong. "But I did not do that drawing on the board."

"So you are to be the judge? Is that it? If you fancy you have not deserved punishment, the punishment is not to be done?"

"I—I——"

Miss Bullivant leaned back in her chair. "I am waiting for your excuse. Your reason. You were seen to go into a shop in Courtfield. You have spent the afternoon shopping?"

"No, Miss Bullivant; I had to keep an appointment."

Dare she tell the truth—that she had been reading aloud to a War victim?

"Very well, you will be gated for the next two half-holidays. I have discussed this with Miss Primrose, and that is the punishment decided upon."

"Gated!" cried Sheila. "Oh, but I——"

"Enough! You will write those lines after preparation this evening, and you will be gated for a week, detained for the next two-half-holidays, doing tasks that I shall set for you. Enough! But for your previous record I should be more severe."

Sheila went from the study, her mind in a whirl. Gated for a week! She was not to see Captain Hargraves for the next two half-holidays. How could she explain that to him? It would not be right to let him know that she had risked so much to see him; it would put him in quite a false position. She would have to write to him and explain. The house-keeper would read the letter to him.

But how she would miss seeing him!

In the Fourth Form corridor she found Barbara and Jemima waiting for her.

"Gated?" asked Jemima.

"Yes, for the next two half-holidays. Nice! But I suppose I'm really lucky."

"Fearfully," nodded Jemima. "Not many girls get gated for a week, what? Only the chosen few. Poor old Sheila! But it was in the best cause. Come and play ping-pong."

"Can't. I've got prep. to do, and lines."

"Bother prep.," said Barbara. "You want cheering up, you know. You're looking fearfully down in the mouth. Let's have a ripping game. Come on, do——"

Barbara plucked at her arm.

"No, no. I'd love to, but if I don't do prep. that'll mean another row, and I really must do the lines, too."

So eventually she had her own way, although goodness knew she wanted to play ping-pong in preference to writing lines! But there was no sense in asking for more trouble. Besides, there was Eleanor to face still.

Eleanor was pacing the study when Sheila entered, and she wheeled upon her in fury.

"Think yourself lucky that I am not reporting this to Miss Primrose. I think I know now how you got that dress for the dance. You stole this pendant and pawned it. Perhaps you have taken the dress back—perhaps you only got it on approval or hired it?"

Sheila began to get out her books for preparation, but Eleanor snatched them away and flung them on the floor.

"Eleanor!" Sheila gasped. "Really!"

"Yes, really. We're going to have this out," snapped Eleanor, "here and now. Where did you get that dress?"

"It doesn't concern you, but it was a present."

"I see. This was a present, too!" sneered Eleanor. "We'll see what Miss Primrose has to say about it."

She walked to the door and paused with her hand on the knob. Sheila turned to her anxiously, and then shrugged her shoulders.

"Do as you like," she said. "If you must make mischief, do."

But Eleanor had no intention at all of going to Miss Primrose. She had no wish to be asked where she had obtained the pendant. Miss Primrose would realise that it was too valuable to be her own, and

might suspect that it was her mother's. Then, indeed, the fat would be in the fire!

"I don't believe it is your pendant," said Sheila suddenly, discerningly. "It's probably your mother's."

Eleanor went white.

"You spy!" she cried furiously. "Oh, you horrid spy! Have you been reading my letters?"

"Too late, she saw she had given herself away. Sheila looked at her steadily.

"Of course I have not looked at your letters. But I know you now. I know that you would go to Miss Primrose with that silly story—yes, and like to go, too, only it would mean that you would get into hot water."

Eleanor had no reply prepared for that. "Anyway, it isn't your pendant," she said at last, lamely. "You stole it! Thief! Common little thief!"

How easy it would have been for Sheila to say that Captain Hargraves had given it to her; yet how could she say where she had got it? The pendant was obviously Eleanor's. The design was peculiar, and it certainly had been converted from an ear-ring. Could there be two similar?

Eleanor's words seemed to echo in the silence she followed them. "Common little thief!" But Sheila had had enough.

"Eleanor, you dare say that again!" And there was quite a flash in Sheila's eyes. "If you dare to say that again I shall go to Miss Primrose myself!"

Eleanor had not been spoken to like that before, and she was quite dazed. Was this Sheila addressing her—the underling, the pauper! Really! As for putting down the pendant—never! Eleanor marched out of the study with it in her hand, and then went up to the dormitory to put it safely away.

When she reached the dormitory she studied it lovingly, turning it over in her hand. She had the light switched on, and was standing in the direct rays, the better to examine the pendant. But what she saw when she looked at the other side staggered her.

The pendant was not hers! There was a difference. On the back it said "Angela," but the engraving was so elaborate that it took quite a moment to read it. Angela! Why, it had said Muriel on the other one. Muriel was Eleanor's mother's name, and Angela—Angela was the name of Sheila's mother!

Eleanor felt quite giddy all at once. The pendant was Sheila's mother's, then. But why had Sheila not said so? Surely she would have said if that were so? Then whence had it come? Where could she have got it that afternoon except from Captain Hargraves?

Her mind in a whirl, Eleanor switched out the light and went from the dormitory. But it was not to her study to find Sheila that she went. Even though she knew now that the pendant was not hers, she meant to keep it—and then investigate. For if Captain Hargraves had had this pendant, whom could he be but Sheila's father—and Eleanor's uncle?

"Goodness!" murmured Eleanor. "My uncle—I wonder? Dare I?" And then she smiled wickedly.

CHAPTER 17.

Lost—and Found.

"I SUS-SAY, Babs!"

Barbara Redfern was busy writing an essay in Study No. 4. It was two days following the events already related, and Babs was in no mood to be interrupted by fat Bessie Bunter.

"Give' her another sweet, Mabs," she said wearily.

Mabel Lynn, who was looking at a small blot on the wall for inspiration, took out a bag of sweets from the pocket of her drill dress. Very carefully she unstuck one and gave it to Bessie Bunter.

"That should last you twenty minutes," she said. "And if I haven't finished this beastly essay by then I shall just put down any rubbish."

"Copy mine," said fat Bessie grandly. "Well, that'd be a sure way of putting down rubbish," reflected Barbara. "Bother now. I've put the word rubbish down. Why can't you keep quiet, Bessie!"

The essay was not an easy or pleasant one. It was about courtesy, and, of course, as every girl would mention about Sir Walter Raleigh, the cloak, and Queen Elizabeth, that had to be omitted.

"Blessed if I know why you girls make a fuss like this about a simple essay," said Bessie, shaking her head, the sweet hastily finished. Really, giving Bessie a sweet to make her stop talking only encouraged her. "I've just given a description of how to drop a—"

"Drop what?" asked Barbara in surprise. "Why, a curtsy, what we had to write about," said Bessie in equal surprise. "You just put back your left leg—your right, and nearly sus-sit on it, only not quite, you know. Of course, I dare say if you girls were—"

"Ha, ha, ha! Courtesy—politeness, chivalry," said Barbara in merriment. "Dropping a curtsy is just a form of courtesy. But Janey won't like that essay."

It took a moment or two to persuade Bessie that she had written her essay all about the wrong subject, and then there was some degree of peace while she re-wrote it, mentioning how Sir Walter Raleigh had put down his cloak in the mud and then offered it to Queen Elizabeth to put on to keep off the rain. And Queen Elizabeth had never smiled again, according to Bessie, which is not to be wondered at.

The essay finished, Bessie started again. "I sus-say, Babs, you haven't answered my question yet."

"What question?" said Barbara amicably, now that the essay was finished.

"Why, about findings being keepings, you know. Now, suppose a girl fuf-found something—" Bessie's eyes goggled behind her large glasses, and she wagged a forefinger at her friends.

"It has been done," admitted Barbara, and then looked up as the door opened. "Hallo, Clara!"

"Hallo!" said Clara. "You kids mentioned Sir Walter Raleigh and the cloak?"

"Ha, ha! No!"

"Good!" said Clara. "The first ones that haven't. Anyone would think it was the only giddy courteous thing in history. And is it right what Freda says—that Richard the Second gave up the crown to Henry the Seventh, saying: 'You're a better man than I am, Gunga Dhin'?"

"Ha, ha, ha! No."

"Bother!" exclaimed Clara. "I'll take that out of Freda. I put it in. Isn't she the limit? Still, it's right at the end, luckily."

"I sus-say, Clara!" exclaimed Bessie, as she was going.

"Well, say on."

"I put that bit about Sir Walter Raleigh, you know. But that isn't what I was going to say. Suppose a girl—suppose a girl found something rather valuable,

you know. Well, suppose she did—" Bessie eyed the girls measuringly.

Barbara and Mabel were looking at Bessie in perplexity. She was certainly being mysterious. And Jemima and Marjorie, who came along at that moment, had to have it explained to them.

"I should try cold water," said Jemima. "Get a big jugful, Clara."

"Right-ho!"

"Stop!" cried Bessie. "This is jolly serious. Suppose a girl—any girl—not me, you know—just any girl, fuf-found something rather valuable. Suppose it were a ring or a brooch, for instance—"

Barbara looked at Mabel and then at Bessie.

"What have you found, Bessie?" she asked quite anxiously, for Bessie, although honest, was quite stupid about the value of things.

Bessie assumed an injured, martyrlike look.

"Who said I'd found anything? I was just putting a hypotenuse case."

"Oh crumbs! Hypothetical, you mean," said Barbara. "Too long a word. What is it you've found?"

Bessie rose from her chair.

"I refuse to discuss the matter," she said, with dignity. "I shall wait until there's a reward offered—I mum-moan that—" She broke off and blinked at them. She would have gone from the study then, but Clara barred the doorway.

"Whoa!" she said. "Not so quickly, Fatima."

The girls were serious now. At first they had been amused by Bessie's hypothetical case of a girl who had found something; but now they really believed her. They saw it was not a subject for laughter.

Bessie Bunter was quite duffer enough to imagine that because she had found something and did not know the owner she could keep it. That would not be stealing to Bessie!

"If you've found anything," Barbara said, "you really must take it to Miss Primrose, Bessie, although it's funny that no one has mentioned losing it."

Jemima intervened.

"Might have been at the dance."

That was an idea.

"My goodness, yes!" exclaimed Barbara.

"Of course. There was heaps of jewellery being worn, and perhaps the owner didn't realise it might have been lost here."

"Yes, that's so. Rake it out, Bessie," advised Mabel. "Let's see it."

But Bessie seemed rather aggrieved.

"There ought jolly well to be a reward," she said aggrievedly.

"Well, perhaps there will be," said Barbara patiently. "Only you ought to want to give it back to the owner without that."

When Barbara meant business she spoke firmly, and there was firmness in her tone now. So Bessie, although she grumbled, gave in.

"Very well," she said, "I'll show you just where it is, girls. Of course, it's hidden in a frightfully clever place, naturally."

"Naturally," said Clara. "Where you won't be able to find it again."

"I can find it."

Bessie Bunter went to the study cupboard in a most mysterious way that made the girls more impatient than ever with her. Then she flung back the door, watching them the while to see the effect. Next she took out a toffee-tin.

"Oh, buck up!" pleaded Mabel.

Bessie swept the tin round, and then, removing the lid, held it forward, much as a conjurer might reveal a trick.

"There!" she said. "Takes your breath away, eh?"

It did take their breath away. Bessie, short-sighted though she was, could see how amazed they looked, and a faint unconsciousness came over her.

"Wh-what's the matter?" she asked.

"Why, you duffer," said Barbara, in anxiety, "it's not there—it's gone!"

"Gig-gone?" Bessie squealed. "Mummy diamond pendant gone?"

She glared into the tin, and then went pale. The diamond pendant had certainly gone.

What a silence there was!

"Are you sure you put it there, Bessie?" Barbara asked.

"Pup-positive," said Bessie, quite distressed.

"But no one would have taken it!" Mabel exclaimed worriedly. "That's too ridiculous. No one's been here!"

"Oh, really! Sheila came in!" said Bessie.

"Yes! Sheila came to borrow a book. I said she could," said Barbara. "But don't start mentioning names, Bessie. It isn't at all fair. Sheila isn't that kind of

girl, naturally. But—but what ought we to do? Report it to Miss Prim?"

"Or ask questions first," demurred Jemima.

"Ask questions," said Barbara. "Come on. Just in case someone has been playing a joke. Then if no one admits anything we must report it."

Barbara and Mabel went down the end of the corridor to start, while Clara and Jemima went the other. They reached the doorway of Study No. 11, and then paused. The door was ajar and they had a glimpse of a girl inside. It was Sheila Wynn. Sheila had something in her hand, something that flashed in the rays from the light, and at sight of that Mabel clutched Barbara's arm, and Barbara gave a gasp of dismay.

For in Sheila's hand was a diamond pendant! And Sheila was the girl who had been to Study No. 4! There was only one explanation; there could be only one—that Sheila had taken the pendant.

Barbara Redfern was quite pale as her eyes met Mabel's. Sheila Wynn, of all girls, a thief, a sneak-thief, who pried into cupboards when girls were out of studies. Could it be possible?

Yet what other explanation was there?

Barbara drew back and took Mabel's arm. They moved out of earshot.

"Are you going in," asked Mabel indignantly, "and demand where she got it?"

But Barbara had another line of action.

"No," she said under her breath. "We can't do that. Let us give her a sporting chance. I will say that something valuable has been taken from our study—for a joke."

Mabel nodded her head in agreement. It was better not to have a scandal in the Form. Thus fronted, Sheila would have a chance to admit the truth. But how appalling it all was—a thief in the Form, and that girl one they had all liked!

Together they returned to Sheila's study, and Barbara pushed open the door. As she did so Sheila swiftly hid her hand behind her back, turning to face them.

How hard Barbara found it to try to speak casually, to keep a look of condemnation from her eyes!

"Sheila," she began, "someone's been playing a joke in our study—someone who went in there while we were out. Something was taken from a tin in the cupboard. I suppose you don't know anything about it?"

How closely they studied her then. And she went red.

"Barbara!" Sheila cried. "Of course not. You don't think I would take anything from your study?"

Barbara's heart sank, and Mabel's mouth became grimly set.

What Barbara wanted to say at that moment was: "Then where did you get that pendant?" But she could not forget that Sheila had been a friend of hers, and the words would not come. So all she said was:

"Well, it's a rather serious matter. I'm going to give the girl a chance. We shall all be out of the study, and she can put it back."

That said, Barbara turned to the door. A moment later she was out in the corridor.

"It's pretty clear," said Mabel miserably. "Oh, Babs, Sheila a thief!"

"A thief!" said Barbara heavily. "Yes, it looks like it. I shall know that pendant she was holding if I see it, and if it's returned to our study—well, we shall know who was the thief."

"And it not?" queried Mabel, a tremor in her voice.

Barbara's face was grimly set. She shrugged her shoulders.

"Then, of course, I shall report everything to Miss Primrose. Sheila will have to explain where she got that pendant."

But Sheila Wynn, little dreaming what a dark cloud hung over her head, was at that moment putting back the pendant in Eleanor's writing-case which lay on the table. It had been given to her—and yet it was surely Eleanor's. Then and there she made a resolve.

"Whatever happens, I will never say that that pendant was given me by Captain Margraves."

CHAPTER 18. Clever Eleanor.

"No one," said Tomboy Clara Trevlyn.

The questioning parties had just rejoined in the Fourth Form corridor; and Barbara Redfern and her special friend, Mabel Lynn, looking peculiarly distressed, faced Jemima, Clara, and Marjorie.

"You didn't mention the pendant?" Barbara asked.

"No; Jemima said not," Clara ex-

plained. "If it's lost it will have to go to Miss Primrose. It's the usual rule when things are lost—no description published before it is claimed."

Barbara Redfern nodded her head, but she did not mention to them what she and Mabel had seen. First, she would see if it were returned. And if it were, then the less scandal in the Form the better. That was how Barbara looked at it. If Sheila had fallen in a moment of folly, Barbara's present decision was that she should not be branded, and, as would be inevitable, expelled from the school.

"Well, we'd better go down and play ping-pong," she said. "You trot along and get the things, and Mabel and I will go straight down and wait for you."

"I s-say," piped Bessie Bunter. "P-perhaps it was a burglar, you know."

"Perhaps," said Barbara carelessly, and then gave Bessie a severe look. "But we don't want this talked about, remember. Not a word!"

The Study No. 7 trio went back for the ping-pong things, and Bessie Bunter accompanied them, remembering that there was a cake in Study No. 7, which might be tactfully mentioned when other things were taken out.

Barbara and Mabel went down the stairs in silence.

It so happened that Eleanor Lawton was at that moment coming up. And Eleanor had at last made a decision. The discovery that there were two pendants had worried her considerably. For suppose the other one should come to light? Sheila would know that there were two; and then, indeed, things might begin to move!

That was the very last thing that Eleanor wanted, so she decided now to make discreet inquiries.

"Oh, Barbara, could I have a word with you?" she said, much as though it were doing Barbara a favour.

"You can have a word with both of us—no extra charge," Barbara said.

"The fact is, I've lost something valuable," Eleanor said, "and, naturally, I'm not a girl to make a fuss about it."

Something valuable lost! No wonder that Barbara and Mabel took notice.

"Yes, very valuable. And I don't want news of it to get about. Some girls might not be above stealing."

It was on the tip of Barbara's tongue to say: "There are no thieves at Cliff

House"; but suddenly she remembered Sheila Wynn.

"What is it you've lost?" she said.

The answer came as a shock. Eleanor could not have given greater surprise had she said a pet elephant. She said:

"My diamond pendant!"

Barbara and Mabel nearly collapsed.

"A—a diamond pendant? Describe it?"

Eleanor described it minutely.

"How—how long has it been lost?" asked Barbara faintly.

"Oh, before the dance!" Eleanor said.

"Only I haven't wanted to make a fuss. All the same, I know there's one girl who has had her eye on it—the only girl who has ever seen it here," she added. "I won't mention her name!"

But what wealth of meaning there was in her tone. Who was likely to have been the only girl to have seen it? The girl who shared her study—Sheila Wynn!

"It's been found," Barbara said, controlling her surprise. "Bessie found it; but now it has been lost again. Oh, dear, this is really awful!"

"Bessie! Why didn't she give it to me?" said Eleanor furiously. "How did she lose it?"

There was nothing to do but tell her.

"It was put in a tin in the study cupboard, and has been taken," Mabel struck in.

"But we fancy the girl who has taken it will put it back," Barbara added. "We are leaving the study empty—so as to give the girl a chance."

Eleanor opened her eyes wide.

"Then you know the name of the girl who took it? Tell me! I demand to know!" she exclaimed imperiously.

But Barbara was firm.

"I shall not tell you," she said. "But—but I saw her with it in her hand. When it is put back in our study you shall have it. That's all. If it is not put back, then I shall take Bessie along to Miss Primrose and make a full report."

That quite satisfied Eleanor, who went up the stairs humming, and so to her study. She did not say a word to Sheila when she entered; but she wanted to get that girl out of the way.

It did not take long for Eleanor to make herself such a nuisance that Sheila preferred not to stay. She brought out her gramophone and, knowing that Sheila was reading, put on a noisy record.

For a moment or two only Sheila fought

against the uneven odds; then she rose from her chair and went out.

"Now," muttered Eleanor, and locked the door behind her enemy.

Then she went to her writing-case, opened it, and took out the pendant, not noticing that it had been moved. She did not know that when she had been writing a letter early that morning the pendant had slipped a little sideways, thus revealing itself to Sheila.

The pendant in her hand, she shut the writing-case. Next, with a little mean smile, she took an envelope from a packet of Sheila's on the bookcase, and put the pendant inside. The next minute she had passed out into the corridor, and, unseen by anyone, had tossed it on to the table in Study No. 4.

Barbara Redfern and her friends, meanwhile, played ping-pong to keep away depressing thoughts, little dreaming how Eleanor was planning to mislead them.

The games-room was newly-built and adjoined the Common-room proper, so that while some made as much noise as they liked, others could read or play draughts in comparative peace.

Barbara, Mabel, Clara, Bessie, Freda Foote, and one or two others played off a tournament in anything but quiet style, while Augusta Anstruther-Browne kept getting up furiously from her armchair in the Common-room to tell them to be quiet. But, of course, no one took any notice of Augusta.

Katie Smith was reading a "thriller," leaning forward in her chair, a rapt expression on her face; Marjorie Hazeldene was mending a frock of Clara's; Nancy Bell and Marcia Loftus wore quarrelling over draughts. That was the scene that Eleanor found a moment or two later when she entered the Common-room. And not one of them looked up as she entered. Not even Katie, who was sitting in Eleanor's favourite chair.

"Katie, you've got my armchair," she said.

Katie was far too immersed in her book to hear. To make Katie hear in such circumstances one simply had to shake her.

Of course, the chair was not really Eleanor's any more than Katie's.

Eleanor tossed her head, and then, seeing that there was no armchair for her, she went to the door of the ping-pong-room, pushing it ajar. There came the tap, tap of a rapid game.

"No entrance," came Clara's voice, as the door was pushed. "Game in progress. Dry up, Bessie! Nineteen, sixteen! Change service! Sixteen, nineteen! Swipe away, Mabs!"

Eleanor, now thoroughly annoyed, put her foot in the small opening she had managed to make; but Clara did not budge. An entrance then would have cramped the players' style, for the table had been moved nearer to the door on account of the light.

"Well, really," expostulated Eleanor, "this is the limit. Clara, will you be so good as to open this door immediately?"

No reply,
"I s-say," piped Bessie Bunter, when a cheer followed the announcement that Barbara had beaten Mabel by two points, "I say—you girls, something j-jolly important! I've thought of something!"

"Rubbish!" exclaimed Clara.
"Don't exaggerate, dear," said Barbara. "Come and play ping-pong, and rest your mind for a minute."

"Oh, really! But it's fearfully important. It's about the pendant," Bessie squealed.

Eleanor had been about to push hard against the door, but now she stopped and listened.

"What about it?" said Barbara. "If you'd told me in the first place, instead of having all this secrecy, there'd be no bother."

"B-but I was waiting for the reward," rebuked the fat girl. "And what I've remembered is this: Suppose I didn't put it in the toffee-tin."

"What? You said you did!" came a chorus.

They stared at the fat girl in dismay. Really, Bessie was the limit.

"I kn-know; but I've just remembered. I took it out of there," said Bessie, "and hid it at the bottom of my bed under the mattress. It came to me in a flash."

CHAPTER 19. Proof Positive.

WHAT to make of the fat girl now Barbara Redfern & Co. did not know. Really, Bessie Bunter was the most exasperating of girls. For stupidity she could have won rows of medals, as Clara pointed out.

"Do you realise," said Barbara, quite

severely, "that you may have caused a lot of unpleasantness and suspicion just for nothing?"

"Me?" said Bessie innocently. "I like that! Why, it was you made all the fuss, Mabs! You jolly well know you did! You went round the Form, not me. So there!"

Barbara sighed and looked at Mabel. Then they both laughed relievedly. If the pendant was really there, then the fact that Sheila had been into their study did not matter at all. And why should she have thought to look under Bessie's bed?

There were two pendants. That was the obvious conclusion, and one of them was Sheila's.

Barbara led the way from the ping-pong-room, and, despite Augusta's furious protests, they simply tore across the Common-room and tumbled out in a crowd. In a bunch they swarmed up the staircase to the dormitory, and made for Bessie's bed.

"Now produce the pendant, Fatima," said Mabel.

Bessie Bunter went to the mattress, and, with the air of a conjurer, pulled it back.

But there was no sign of the pendant.

"Not here," said Barbara. "Search farther along."

They searched and searched. They even took the mattress right off; but there was no pendant, and Bessie Bunter blinked in dismay.

"Oh, really! But I'm certain I put it there, you know. I've got a ripping memory, girls!"

"Oh, spiffing!" sniffed Clara. "You were certain it was in the toffee tin, you duffer!"

Bessie puckered her forehead, scratched her ear, and blinked hard. She was puzzled. The mighty brain of a Bunter was completely bewildered.

It was, however, no laughing matter. Bessie claimed to have found a pendant, and there was just her word to go upon. Apparently she had lost it. There was no proof really that it had ever been found, except that Bessie would hardly tell such a deliberate and stupid lie.

Nevertheless, unless it came to light very soon, she would be held responsible for its loss.

Back to the study was then the only journey for them; and back they went to see if the pendant was there.

"Not much chance," said Barbara, as the study was reached. "And—"

Her finger was on the light switch; the others were grouped about her.

Flick! On came the light, and, as the study was illuminated, Barbara and Mabel stepped forward at the same instant. But it was Barbara who picked up the envelope from the table. An extraordinary expression was on her face as she felt the solid article inside.

"My hat! Surely that isn't it?" gasped Clara.

Barbara, for reply, pulled out the contents, and a diamond pendant winked and flashed in the light.

No one spoke; there was nothing to be said which everyone could not guess. There was a thief in the Form! But Barbara and Mabel alone thought they could guess her name.

Jemima, however, was the first to speak, and she spoke worriedly.

"This is rather uncomfortable, what? We know that someone's a thief—but who is it? Means we suspect almost everyone, you know. I don't quite like it."

"The envelope's a clue, of course," said Mabel.

Clara gave a short, jerky laugh.

"Yes, it's one of mine," she said. "I sold a packet to Sheila the other day, so that's not much help. I mean to say—Sheila! Well, it's absurd!"

Barbara and Mabel looked as white of face as though they were guilty, and their manner affected the others.

"Why, what's the matter?" asked Clara.

For reply, Barbara closed the door. Then she faced them.

"I think you ought to know," she said.

"We can keep it dark from the others, and say that it's turned up. No one need be suspected of theft."

That was instantly agreed upon, of course,

"But there's something you ought to know, as you believe that one of the girls is a thief—and that is—well, we passed a certain study, and saw the girl there looking at this pendant."

"Oh, crumbs!" said Clara faintly. "Who was it?"

Barbara looked steadily at Bessie.

"Bessie dear, will you run over to the tuckshop and see if they have any of that mixed toffee left?"

Bessie blinked.

"Y-yes, after I've heard the girl's name."

"I may not tell her name," said Barbara. "Run along, there's a dear."

But Bessie knew quite well that she was to be kept in the dark, and she did not like the idea at all. But she wanted the toffee, so she held out her hand. The door closed behind her a second later, and then Barbara whispered the name.

"Between ourselves," she said, "it was Sheila. Mabs and I saw her, and—and—"

The door opened suddenly behind them, and, startled, they all spun round, to find Eleanor in the doorway, dragging Bessie by the shoulder.

"A little spy!" cried Eleanor. "She was listening at the door!"

"Oh, Bessie!" exclaimed Barbara in dismay.

Bessie quaked.

"I wasn't!" babbled the fat girl. "I didn't hear you say anything. I really didn't, Babs. If you think I heard you give the girl's name, I jolly well didn't! You may have said Sheila or not—or anyone, she finished rather lamely.

"Bessie! If you dare utter one word of this!" said Barbara furiously. "I think you're perfectly horrid to listen, and the least you can do is to hold your tongue!"

Bessie Bunter, meeting Barbara's eyes, muttered something which might have been an apology, and then fairly slunk away, humiliated, while Eleanor closed the door and faced the girls in the study.

Then she saw the pendant on the table.

"Ah! Found!" she cried. "Oh, hurrah, hurrah! How really splendid!" And she picked up the piece of jewellery delightedly.

"I can tell you what name it has on the back—Angela—look! Read it. Barbara, if you want proof!"

Barbara read the name and nodded.

"As it is yours, here it is," she said. "I suppose really I ought to ask for proof."

"Well, my mother could prove it—or Sheila—she's closer at hand."

"Sheila!"

What a gasp it was!

"Yes; she has seen it often enough," said Eleanor innocently. "Too often, perhaps. It's not a nice thing to say, but—well, that girl once sneaked it from me!"

The others were dumbfounded.

Eleanor eyed them, and nodded her head as though to an unspoken thought.

"It was Sheila who took it. You may as well tell me. I heard what Bessie said."

Barbara was in a more worried frame of mind than ever now. She had never intended that Eleanor should know this.

"We don't want to get it all over the school!" she said. "We——"

"No, no!" interrupted Eleanor dramatically. "Goodness, no! Spare her. I want to!" She spread her hands and looked at them in turn. "Promise me, all of you, not to let this go any further. It is my pendant, and I am the one who ought to complain, if any. But I do not want to down a girl. Sheila is poor, and, after all, she lost her father in the War."

She said it all quite dramatically, and the girls were impressed, despite themselves. How strange that Eleanor should be thus imploring them!

"Well, of course, we wouldn't make a fuss," said Clara. "The only thing to do is to hush it up. But it's not a nice business, is it?"

"Horrid!" said Mabel Lynn. "Of course, I'm finished with Sheila after this!"

It was with difficulty that Eleanor kept the delight from showing in her face.

"Poor Sheila!" she said simply. "I suppose it is awful to be poor; but that is really no reason at all why one should become a thief, is it? Well, thank goodness it is back, anyway! Thank you, Barbara. I'll keep it in a safer place after this—away from light fingers!"

That said, she went out of the room.

"Oh crumbs!" groaned Clara, and dropped into the armchair. "This is awful!"

"Dreadful!"

A thief in the Form—and that thief Sheila Wynn! How could they ever treat her as a friend again! It was not the theft of the pendant alone. In order to find it, Sheila must have pryed into the cupboard and the biscuit-tin—for no one doubted now that the pendant had been in that tin. A girl who pryed in other's studies—well, she could not be a friend of theirs.

"We just have to drop her, that's all," said Barbara. "But not too obviously. I suppose it is right to keep it dark—not to report it?"

"She had too much of a fright," nodded Clara. "She'll never do anything of the sort again! But I'm jolly surprised, and disappointed. It's quite cut me up."

CHAPTER 20.

The Form Against Her.

THE next few days were the loneliest that Sheila Wynn had ever passed at Cliff House. It was rare in the ordinary course of events that she did not receive some smiling remark from Barbara, or walk arm-in-arm with Jemima. But now it seemed that they avoided her.

And Eleanor, too! There was a queer, triumphant manner about that girl.

One night, in the study, Eleanor was busy with some padlocks and keys. Sheila, sitting at the table busy with preparation, looked at her in surprise. She was more surprised still when the study door opened and Piper, the school porter, entered.

"Oh, that's the thing I want padlocking, Piper!" said Eleanor, and pointed to the desk in the corner, and then to the table drawer. "And don't leave screws for anyone to undo easily."

Piper nodded his head in his gloomy way, and examined the drawer and the desk.

"Specting burglars, miss?"

"Well, one never knows. I don't want to be robbed again!"

And it was at Sheila she looked deliberately. Piper looked at Sheila, too, and saw that she was crimson. Of course, Piper would say something about that later. At present he just took measurements and nodded.

"Right, miss, I'll do it first thing in the morning when the studies is being done."

When he had gone Sheila looked up grimly.

"Are you locking up the desk and drawer to keep the things from me, Eleanor?" she asked.

"Yes. Rather trying of me," drawled Eleanor. "Still, the others are doing the same."

Sheila put down her pen. The colour drained from her cheeks now.

"What do you mean by that?" she gasped.

"Mean?" asked Eleanor, looking down at her books. "Oh, nothing at all, of course; but I had to warn them that you are a thief!"

"What, Eleanor? What are you saying?" Sheila sprang up from her chair, her hands clenched, her eyes blazing furiously.

"Well, aren't you?" demanded Eleanor. "Didn't you steal my pendant?"

"I did not. That pendant was given me."

"Well, you're a receiver of stolen goods. Obviously the pendant was found, and sold cheaply to someone without a scruple—a friend of yours."

Sheila stood there quite numb. She could not believe that she had been branded a thief. Who would believe such a silly story told by Eleanor?

"Haven't you noticed how they're all cutting you?" went on Eleanor lightly, and laughed. "What a thick skin you must have, to be sure!"

"You're talking silly nonsense!" retorted Sheila chokily. "No one would believe so silly a story!"

"No?" said Eleanor, and she went over to the gramophone and put on a record. "Well, perhaps you'll say who gave you the pendant, as you call it; then I'll very quickly see that the police are on their track."

Sheila sat down again, but she was trembling all over.

"That is mere nonsense," she said uneasily. "You don't imagine someone has burgled the school?"

"No, I don't. I know who stole the pendant."

"It was not stolen; it may have been picked up, and—"

She was going to say that perhaps it had been found by a blind man who had not known its value. But Captain Hargraves had seemed to know its value.

"Found! Well, people who find valuable things and keep them go to prison!" sneered Eleanor.

Sheila opened her mouth to deny that; and yet she knew it must be true. Her heart sank within her. Captain Hargraves had "come across" the pendant, as he had said. And what could that mean but that he had found it? He was not a thief—that was unthinkable.

A moment later Eleanor went out of the room; but Sheila sat still, unable to work.

Now she began to understand why it was the others had seemed to shun her. Why Barbara, seeing her coming up the stairs, had turned back; why Mabel Lynn had seemed not to hear her when she called; why Clara had forgotten all about their appointment to practise hockey. She was branded a thief!

Suddenly the study seemed unbearable to her. She felt that she could stay there no

longer. A thief! That was why they had looked at her so strangely; why Marcia Loftus had turned away her head when she passed.

Sheila went out of the study and down the corridor.

On the stairs, as she went down, she met Philippa Derwent and Phyllis Howell, talking merrily. At sight of her their manner changed.

Phyllis Howell, however, stopped, and her voice, when she spoke, was gruff.

"Oh, by the way, Sheila!" she said. "Sorry to disappoint you; but the fact is we've found that—er—Philippa's aunt can't have as many girls to tea as we thought."

Sheila hardly knew what she said.

"Oh, on Saturday, you mean?"

Her voice was like lead.

"That's it," nodded Philippa; in relief, but her face was pink. "It must be a disappointment—"

"Not at all," said Sheila, raising her chin; and there was a touch of scorn in her voice.

Then she went on quickly, knowing how they stared after her. But what a fib that had been! How she would have liked to go with Philippa, Phyllis, Barbara and the others to tea with Philippa's adopted aunt, who had such a lovely house, and gave visitors such a stunning time! It was a week ago that the invitation had been given; now it was retracted!

Was there no one loyal to her? Was there no one to doubt Eleanor's wild statement? Had she but known the whole truth, then she would have understood, and might have cleared her name. But she only thought that Eleanor had told the story of the pendant, and that she was being judged on that alone.

Where was Jemima? Jemima was just. Surely she could make Jemima understand!

It was in the Hall that she found Jemima.

"What cheer?" said Jemima; but the brightness seemed gone from her voice, and Sheila's heart sank.

Should she tell Jemima about the pendant; explain that Captain Hargraves had given it to her? She nearly blurted out the truth, but fear held her back. For Jemima, too, would wonder how he had gained possession of it.

"Jemima," Sheila said, while Jemima polished her monocle with that engrossed

air she had. "If—suppose a person found something rather valuable, and—and kept it, not—not knowing the owner. Would it be stealing? Would you—would you despise that person?"

Jemima gave a slight start, and looked at her steadily.

If only Sheila had not been in such an anxious, flustered state she would have realised how Jemima would interpret that question—that she would think that it was a repetition of Bessie's hypothetical case.

"Well," Jemima said, "a thief is a thief, alas; and thieves are despicable, you know. Stealing by finding is still stealing. So there we are, Oh, there's Babs calling me. So-long!"

And away she went, although it was not Barbara calling her at all.

Even Jemima! Now she had not a friend left in the school—not one! On every side there were unfriendly looks; everyone turned the cold shoulder.

Her pride said: "Let them think it! What does it matter when you know that you are innocent?"

Yet, what consolation was there in that?

If only she could tell her mother, and ask her guidance! If only she had a father—someone like Captain Hargraves! Oh, if it were possible to tell him all that had happened! He was not a thief; there was some mistake somewhere. He could not be a thief; he could not have found that pendant. Surely he must have bought it!

Dare she? Could she go and explain to him—even though it meant breaking bounds?

CHAPTER 21.

The Last Straw.

IF there had been a scene, if all the girls had faced Sheila with the theft, then it would not have seemed half so bad.

She could have excused herself. She could have explained. But this dropping her—this fading out of their friendship—was the unkindest cut of all. She had no remedy.

"I can't go on like this," she told herself miserably.

There was a strange solemnity in the school Hall. How ponderously the clock ticked. Stella Stone walked from the

monitress' hall, saw Sheila, nodded and smiled.

It was like a ray of sunshine through fog. Stella had smiled—and one of her kindest, brightest smiles. Stella, the head monitress, did not condemn her! Sheila wanted to run across and take Stella by the arm to explain everything to her, and to ask her advice. But the door was closed upon Stella, and Sheila herself had not moved.

Besides, Stella had smiled because she did not know what rumour was saying. If she knew, would she smile?

There came a footstep on the stairs behind Sheila, and she made an involuntary movement to run away. But pride held her fast, and her head went up. Why should she run away? She was guilty of nothing. Let her face them all proudly.

The girl who came down the stairs was fat Bessie Bunter, and she had not yet seen Sheila. Bessie was short-sighted, and at that distance she could not have recognised a girl, even with her thick glasses to lend assistance.

"I sus-say, wh-what time is it?"

"Ten minutes to eight!" said Sheila, and her heart leapt.

To have even fat, silly Bessie to talk to was better than being completely ignored.

But Bessie Bunter, hearing Sheila's voice, drew herself up.

"Oh, is that you, Sheila?" she said, in a peculiar, curt way.

"Why, yes—"

"I didn't recognise you, you know. I don't want to know what the time is, thank you, from you."

And fat Bessie strutted down the stairs and across the Hall, walking right up to the clock, peered at it mistily, and retraced her steps, putting up her fat nose as she walked past Sheila.

Sheila's face was crimson.

Bessie Bunter disappeared from view, having shown what she thought of a girl who robbed her of a reward—which Eleanor would surely have paid.

But after Bessie came others. There sounded voices, and Sheila, who had just started mounting the stairs, hesitated, and then was caught in two minds, for Marcia Loftus, Nancy Bell, and Gwen Cook came on the landing and saw her.

"Oh!" said Marcia, and drew up.

Gwen Cook and Nancy Bell looked past Sheila, and then exchanged glances.

"Just remembered," went on Marcia dramatically. "We'd better go back. I've left my study unlocked—"

"And she's coming up the stairs," said Nancy. "Quick, then! And I don't think I locked the lid of my desk, either—"

Sheila stood rooted to the ground. The three girls disappeared down the corridor in great haste, as though they were indeed terrified lest Sheila should dart into their studies and steal things from the drawers and desks!

A thief! They all believed it. They really thought that she would go the rounds of the studies and pry into cupboards, taking whatever small articles came to hand!

It could not go on. It was impossible. She would have to explain.

Tears came into her eyes, and she paced up and down the Hall, not knowing where she was, going nowhere in particular, distraught with agony of mind. A thief! Branded a thief—when she was quite innocent—and she could not explain!

She must explain. She must go and see Captain Hargraves and get him to explain about the pendant!

But even as she made that decision a still, small voice within her said: "Coward—coward!"

What did it matter what they said! Girls such as Marcia, Gwen, and Nancy—what could it possibly matter what they thought and said!

But it was not only they: there were Barbara and Mabel; even fat Bessie scorned her!

She turned back to the staircase. She would have it out with Barbara. She would explain that she had not really stolen the pendant, but had it given to her. Surely that would be simple! Surely that would be clear to Barbara! It would only need explanation, and all would be well.

Soon Stella would know, and Stella's face would harden. Then the mistresses—finally, Miss Primrose. And it was Eleanor who was to blame. It was Eleanor throughout who had been the cause of it all.

It was spite, because of that new frock at the dance. Just that, and she was branded a thief!

Overwrought, determined that it must end, that she could not possibly go on, she moved towards the stairs.

It was then that Eleanor, having waited in vain in the study for a chance of taunting Sheila, for showing that she was not to be treated with contempt, came down to find her.

Eleanor met her eyes, and Sheila did not flinch.

"Crying!" said Eleanor, for all that she had resolved not to speak.

She could not resist the taunt. "Yes, crying," said Sheila. "And it's all your fault."

"Mine?"

"You know that I am not a thief." "I know nothing of the sort," corrected Eleanor, with a short laugh. "In fact, I know otherwise—the whole Form know you are a thief—"

"Yes, you have spread the story," Sheila said fiercely.

"I—well, you stole my pendant, and you know it," said Eleanor. "But what is the use of talking?"

Then, from behind Sheila, came a stern voice—Miss Primrose's.

"What is this?" Sheila wheeled round fearfully. There stood Miss Primrose, not half a dozen yards away, her face very grim, and yet marked with astonishment.

"I—I—I was arguing with Eleanor," said Sheila, in sudden fright.

Miss Primrose nodded her head coldly. "The Hall is not the place for such arguments. You will come to my study and we will finish the matter there."

She turned on her heel, and Sheila, her heart beating furiously, gave one look at Eleanor, first accusing, then appealing, and followed Miss Primrose.

Miss Primrose knew already! And what would she say? What could she say?

But as she walked across the Hall Sheila held her head high, remembering her resolve. She would not bring Captain Hargraves into this. She was not a thief, and therefore no one in the world could possibly prove her one.

In a moment they were inside Miss Primrose's study.

Eleanor seemed quite unperturbed. She was fiddling with her hair, wanting to look her best in the headmistress' study. That was her first thought. She smoothed

her dress, and she assumed a look of great satisfaction. She had nothing to fear.

Miss Primrose went to her desk, and seated herself. There was a businesslike air about her that told that she knew how important this matter was.

"Eleanor, I heard you call Sheila a thief. That is a very serious charge which I cannot overlook. Either you were guilty of slandering her, in which case you must apologise—or—but let me hear what you have to say."

Eleanor seemed shy. She seemed to fight for words, as though she were reluctant to charge another girl so seriously.

The suspense was dreadful, and all at once Sheila saw that Eleanor's silence and hesitancy was making it worse. It was for her to speak.

"Eleanor accuses me of having stolen a pendant, Miss Primrose."

Miss Primrose's fingers descended on Eleanor.

"A pendant?" she said. "Pray whose?"

"Please, mine, Miss Primrose," pleaded Eleanor. "I didn't want to make a fuss about it. It's rather a valuable pendant, and I lost it. I didn't want to make any trouble—"

"You should have reported the loss immediately," Miss Primrose said sternly, and with a touch of anger. "It was tempting the girl who found it to keep it, when the loss had not been reported."

"I didn't think there would be a thief at Cliff House," Eleanor said, and hung her head—for shame of Cliff House!

"Nor I! Did you find this pendant, Sheila?"

Had she "found" it?

"I—you see—I—"

"Answer my question. Did you have Eleanor's pendant—'yes' or 'no'?"

"Yes, Miss Primrose." Sheila met Miss Primrose's eyes, terrified. She saw now how she was trapped. "I—I was not sure it was hers, though."

"She knew it was. There was only one like it."

"Ah, you had seen it previously, Sheila?"

"Yes, Miss Primrose. But I—I thought there might be two."

"Nonsense! If it closely resembled Eleanor's, your first thought must have been that it was the one she lost. Was that your first thought?"

Sheila raised her head, and her voice

was so low that it could hardly be heard. She spoke what was the truth—but how it accused her!

"Yes, Miss Primrose. That—that was my first thought when I saw it."

"Did you return it to Eleanor—did you inform her—?"

"No, Miss Primrose."

"Very well" Miss Primrose's tone was hard as steel. There was a gleam in her eye, a grim set to her jaw. It seemed as though she had heard enough to confirm her decision.

"Oh, please, Miss Primrose," pleaded Eleanor earnestly. "I know Sheila admired it—I think she only meant to keep it for a little while; only when I saw her with it, naturally I—I was a bit cross and accused her— You see—only I don't want her to be—well—"

Miss Primrose made a curt motion of the hand.

"The matter is out of your hands, Eleanor. The pendant was lost—Sheila knew it was lost; she found a pendant which she at once guessed was yours, but retained possession of it. Have you anything more to say, Sheila?"

Sheila proudly put up her head.

"I did not steal it. I am not a thief, Miss Primrose."

"You kept it—believing it was Eleanor's. That is the same thing. Whether you found it and kept it, that does not matter."

Sheila bit her lip hard. All at once she saw that even if Captain Hargraves had given her the pendant she was guilty according to Miss Primrose—since she had not taken it at once to Eleanor and offered it to her! She must stand on her own feet.

"Unless you can give me a reasonable explanation how it came into your possession—and why you did not give it to Eleanor," said Miss Primrose—she paused—"then Sheila, despite your previous good record, there is only one thing possible. You will be expelled from Cliff House."

Sheila swayed, and all the blood seemed to go from her head. Expelled for something she had not done!

"I am waiting," said Miss Primrose. "That explanation alone can save you, Sheila. Have you anything to say?"

Sheila's voice seemed to come from a vast distance. She hardly knew what she was saying; she could hardly control her thoughts.

"No!" she said.

"Very well, I will ring for Stella, who will take you to the detention-room. Eleanor, you may go."

Miss Primrose's finger descended on the bell-push; and then, as the door opened to let Eleanor out—as Eleanor cast one triumphant look back—Sheila broke down completely, and wept as if her heart would break.

CHAPTER 22.

Beyond Her Control.

ELEANOR did not hesitate to spread the rumour. There was, as she knew, a meeting in the music-room to discuss the details of a concert that the Fourth Form was arranging, and she hurried there the moment she had left Miss Primrose.

It was only a little while before bedtime for the Fourth Form, and the meeting was rather a last-minute affair. No one would have guessed by the cheeriness of that meeting that a tragedy was in course of enactment. The girls were all quite jolly and happy.

Barbara Redfern was taking the chair—or trying to, and Clara Trevlyn was endeavouring to maintain order, but making a good deal more noise in the process than the others whom she was endeavouring to quell.

"Now, girls——"

"Order!" called Clara, and thumped on the floor with her hockey stick.

"I sus-say, you girls——" squeaked Bessie Bunter.

"Go it, Babs!"

Barbara looked round the room with a sigh; but she could not help smiling. Order was not being maintained, and every time that Clara bumped her stick on the floor there came fresh laughter and cheers.

"See how many it takes to break the floor!" giggled Freda Foote. "Biff away!"

Barbara, hoarse with shouting, pointed to the clock.

"Oh dear! Do give me a chance! It's about the concert, girls. Now, who's that gattling at the door?"

"Sheila," said Marcia Loftus, who had not the least idea. In point of fact, it was Eleanor.

"Well, she can't come in," said Clara. "Go on, Babs. They're quiet for a minute."

So Barbara rattled on.

"Girls, the hospital in Courtfield is appealing for funds, and I think we ought to offer to help. My idea is a concert——"

"Hear, hear!"

"I'll sing!" squeaked Bessie Bunter, waving a fat hand.

"Oh, Bessie, do dry up!" cried Barbara.

"Girls, listen to me! All those who are prepared to help in this worthy cause are to send in their names to Mabel Lynn—and state what they can do——"

"Not what they hope they can do," put in Mabel Lynn.

There was a rush at once, and Mabel was surrounded.

"Oh, put me down, Mabs!"

"And me!"

"I can sing."

"Look—I'll do this dance——"

In the excitement, Marcia Loftus forgot to secure the door, and it opened to admit Eleanor in a state of great excitement.

"Girls—girls——"

But no one heeded her at all.

"Eleanor will do a comic song," said Freda Foote. "Without meaning to——"

Eleanor danced round on the edge of the crowd and then took Barbara's arm excitedly.

"Barbara, will you listen to me? It's about Sheila! She's to be expelled."

"Expelled!"

Eleanor had their attention then. Girls stopped at once, whatever it was that they were doing. Those who clamoured around Mabel Lynn paused with their arms outstretched, and then dropped them limply. Bessie Bunter, who had opened her mouth to give a good yell and make herself heard beyond the others, just gave a faint, peculiar wail, and closed her mouth.

Clara, Marjorie, Jemima, Barbara—they just stood and stared.

Expelled!

"Eleanor, what do you mean?" asked Barbara, coming to as from a trance. "Expelled? How? Since when——"

"How did Miss Primrose get to know?" asked Jemima, and there was an unprompted sternness in her tone—so unusual in Jemima.

Eleanor faced them all, and sought to appear deeply moved and contrite.

"Sheila picked a quarrel with me in Hall. She said she wasn't a thief; and then Miss Primrose came up and said we were to explain everything. Sheila admitted it, and she is to be expelled."

"Oh, poor kid!" said Clara involuntarily. "But—but she admitted it, and——" stammered Mabel.

"Yes, she admitted it," said Eleanor as tragically as she could. "So what else could Miss Primrose do?"

All the fire, all the excitement, had gone from the meeting now. There was not a smile to be seen. Marcia and Gwon and Nancy—they, perhaps, did not feel deeply about it. They did not care at all, but even they forbore to voice delight.

"This is awful!" said Barbara. "Of course, the meeting ends; we can't go on with it now poor old Sheila is in hot water like this. I am sorry. Poor old Sheila!"

"I'm dreadfully sorry!" Marjorie Hazeldene said, with tears in her eyes. "Oh, how horrid I was to her! As if it were not bad enough! I wish I hadn't shunned her. I do—— I wonder if I could go and speak to her?"

She turned to the door; but Clara caught her arm, and Clara was solemn and serious like the others.

"No, no! Better not! She'll be weeping her eyes out. She may think that we—well, we're sort of triumphing."

"She might," said Barbara miserably.

Marjorie said nothing, but her cheeks were scarlet. Her kind heart had opened itself at once to Sheila. Whatever the girl had done—thief or not—Marjorie could not hound her down. There was only pity in Marjorie's heart. She wanted to do something to make Sheila's lot less bitter.

Very quietly then the meeting dispersed. Girls talked in whispers, and it was as though in some way Sheila's disgrace reflected upon them.

It was rarely that a girl was expelled at Cliff House; for it was a most severe punishment—the most severe one possible—and only given for the most serious offences. When such a sentence was given a heavy cloud seemed to descend over the whole school. Games, lessons—everything was affected. It was almost as though someone were seriously ill in the school, and there was necessity to walk about on tiptoe.

More than one girl endeavoured to go to the punishment-room. There was quite a crowd of sightseers on the stairs—but the punishment corridor was out of bounds. Stella Stone was there keeping guard so that the condemned girl might have no

chance of communicating with friends, or of escaping.

"Go back!" said Stella angrily, as Marcia Loftus and Nancy Bell appeared in view.

"Oh, I say, Stella, is it right?" asked Marcia. "I heard a rumour——"

"Yes—and you know it is right!" said Stella tartly. "And it's no use thinking you will be able to see her! Begone—all of you! Any girl remaining here will receive a hundred lines!"

So the sightseers disappeared. There was nothing to be seen but a locked door and a monitress sitting on a chair. Behind that door paced a fretful, overwrought girl, sentenced to expulsion. Looking at the door, they seemed to see her. That was it.

Eleanor Lawton did not go near the punishment-room. She was in her study, and, now that the first excitement was over, she was afraid?—terrified of what she had done.

It was she who had had Sheila expelled. She could have saved her. But she had not done so.

The awfulness of it was made apparent by the electric atmosphere of the school, and now Eleanor began to see that she had started something that she could not stop. Whether she had really meant to get Sheila expelled she did not even know for certain herself. She had meant to get Sheila deep into disgrace; but expulsion

And Sheila was her own cousin!

Now Sheila would be expelled—and it would remain for ever a mystery who she was.

Eleanor tried to take consolation in that. It was, after all, what she had wanted. Yet she shook with fear, and her face was deathly white.

Captain Hargraves—if only he knew that Sheila was his daughter! It was from him she had got the pendant. The truth would soon come out.

Easy enough then to undo the damage that had been done. All Eleanor had to do was to go to Captain Hargraves. But dare she—dare she? Would not everyone realise the truth then? Would they not know how she had conspired to this end?

No, it could not be. The ball had been set rolling with amazing ease; but now that it was gathering momentum, nothing could stop it!

CHAPTER 23.

Freedom!

SHEILA WYNN hardly knew what she was doing. There were tears on her cheeks, and as she paced the room she was muttering to herself hysterically. Words tumbled out in any order; she hardly knew that she was saying anything at all. What she muttered was:

"I must not mention him—I must not! He is blind—blind. I must not add to his misery. Oh, mother—mother, what am I to do? Mother—"

And then she flung herself on to the bed and wept.

She did not guess why it was that Captain Hargraves mattered so much to her; that her love for him was so deep. She believed her own father to be dead; and not for one moment did it occur to her that it was Captain Hargraves she had mourned as dead for so many years; that he was the man she had so often prayed she might see in her dreams.

And outside in the corridor Stella Stone stood close to the door, her own face pale. It was not the first time that she had guarded the door when a girl had been sentenced to expulsion, but never before had she heard such bitter weeping.

Stella could not stand there and listen to it. It was preying upon her mind; she was becoming nervous and over-worried herself. At last she put the key in the lock and entered the darkened room.

"Sheila—Sheila, pull yourself together!" she said huskily.

Quite suddenly Sheila sat up and stared at Stella, drawing back.

"Who are you?" she gasped, and drew away on the bed.

"I am Stella—you know me—Stella Stone—"

"Oh, Stella, I'm not guilty! I'm not a thief—I'm not—not—" cried Sheila.

Her sobs ended, her voice queerly hoarse. "Then you must say where you got the pendant. Oh, if you can, you must!" insisted Sheila.

Sheila stood up unsteadily and covered her face with her hands.

Tell them where she had got the pendant—not be expelled! Her mother would not be disgraced! Captain Hargraves would understand; he would explain.

Surely he would not wish her to be as miserable as this!

Those thoughts ran through her mind, and as she looked up again she saw the open door. Escape! Escape! She could run down to Courtfield and find Captain Hargraves!

Under the stress of emotion her mind moved swiftly. Stella stood there regarding her pityingly as Sheila swayed, and when that girl gave a sudden dart forward she was unprepared.

In a moment Sheila had leapt through the doorway.

Slam! The key had turned in the lock, and Stella was hammering on the panels.

Without a second's pause Sheila raced down the corridor. Down the stairs she tore, finding the corridor empty. The girls were now in their dormitories. All was clear. Oh, if only she could open the door—

The bolts were withdrawn, the door was open, and no one had seen her. Freedom at last! She was free! Now for Courtfield and Captain Hargraves!

But Stella's hammering had been heard. Marcia and Gwen, who had sneaked up the stairs to take a peep to see if Stella were there, had gone up to the very door of the detention-room itself.

"Stella, is that you?" they cried.

"Yes. Is the key in the lock? Sheila has escaped—run away. Let me out—"

It was but a second's work to let her out, and then Marcia and Gwen fled back to the dormitory with the news.

The dormitory fairly shook with the babel of voices. Everyone talked at once. Girls half-dressed rushed for the door. But there was one girl who stood quite still—Eleanor Lawton. But a moment later Eleanor was putting on her clothes again with as much haste as possible.

Then, like the wind, she flew out of the dormitory, and cunning made her take the back staircase. She ran as hard as she could, and her heart pumped madly with fear.

Sheila had run away—and where would she be running to but to Captain Hargraves? She must be captured—she must be brought back!

Eleanor seemed to see in this escape the signal of her own doom. Sheila, exhausted by her crying, would not be able to run so swiftly as she; and Eleanor, in

her cunning, had outmanœuvred Sheila already.

For Sheila, as soon as she reached the quadrangle, realised that there would be a hue-and-cry, that Miss Primrose would get out her car. At all costs the road must be shunned. She must run. It was five miles to Courtfield, and she could not run all that way, but she must run until she was some distance from the school, and then rest in the wood—in the dark, lonely wood where the crackling of twigs was like the sound of rifle-shots.

Eleanor, too, made for the woods, hot upon Sheila's heels, knowing that that girl would make for Courtfield, and would not be silly enough to choose the road.

Sheilas tumbled on, crying to herself, and then making a frantic effort to pull herself together.

When she at last reached the wood she stood still and listened. But she had no fear of anything but pursuit. She was only listening to make sure that she was not being followed.

But footsteps came from behind her. She heard the breaking of twigs, the sound of pattering feet, and terror lent her wings. For all that a moment ago her breath had seemed gone, and there was a sharp pain in her side, she managed to run on. At last, she knew how a fox feels when pursued by hounds.

But it was Eleanor, and Eleanor alone, who followed her. Those steps were one girl's.

Sheila stumbled, slipped, and knew that she was done. She could run no more. She must hide.

Panting, gasping, every breath she took an agony, she crawled behind a tree, and so pitiful was her state that she hardly cared then whether she lived or died. But the footsteps came nearer.

Whoever it was that followed was in as bad a state as she, breathing hard.

"Bother! I can't hear her now!"

It was Eleanor's voice, and Sheila caught her breath and tried not to gasp so loudly. Eleanor! It would be her, of course! Even to the end she must pursue her. Even when she escaped she was not to be given a chance.

She almost stepped out into the open to give vent to her rage; but Eleanor went on slowly, pausing every now and again to listen.

But there were no other followers. Once

Eleanor was shaken off she was safe. She must stop when Eleanor stopped, and then must dodge her in the woods.

Now she was pursuing Eleanor, stopping when Eleanor did, so that she should not be heard.

"Sheila," came a voice in the darkness, "is that you? I'm frightened. Where are you?"

And then Eleanor seemed to turn aside as though to make for the road, and Sheila listened and then hurried on. She knew that the road could not be reached from there; she had wandered through the wood herself on a sunny afternoon, and knew that the stream, swollen with recent rain, was there.

Soon Eleanor must return.

She forged on, and reached the place where there was a ford across the stream. The water rushed and swirled in the darkness, making an uncanny noise. The stream itself could not be seen, but the noise of it was audible. It was racing—flooded, swollen. But how deep? Was even the ford, where there were stepping-stones, under water?

Sheila hesitated on the bank of the river, and stepped cautiously forward to make a test.

If it were up to her knees—if it were wadeable at all—she would get across. Elsewhere it would be too deep. It was almost twice as wide as it was before.

And then, as she stood hesitating, she heard a voice—Eleanor's voice—cry out in terror:

"Oh, it's deep! Oh, help——"

Sheila drew back, her heart leaping.

Eleanor's voice rose to a scream, and instantly Sheila realised that she was in the river! Exhausted as she was, what chance had she of fighting that raging current!

"Help!"

CHAPTER 24.

To Save Her Enemy.

"HELP!"

That wild cry came to Sheila Wynn as she stood hesitant on the bank of the stream; and the voice was unmistakably Eleanor Lawton's. Eleanor, her enemy, was in distress!

"Rescue—Sheila!"

Sheila did not hesitate. It seemed as

though all memory of what she had suffered at this girl's hands went from her mind. She forgot that she was herself a fugitive, that time was essential if she were to escape. To delay now would mean certain capture.

"Right," she called, "I'm here——"

Eleanor's frantic cries became quieter. Was she overcome?

In frantic haste, her movements quickened by the fact that the need was so desperate, Sheila fought her way through the undergrowth along the bank to the spot whence Eleanor's voice came. The girl was drifting with the stream!

Sheila stepped into the water and instantly it deepened. In a moment she was up to her waist, and then was swimming in the icy coldness of the swollen stream.

"Sheila——"

Eleanor was nearer now, and Sheila, guided by the voice, struck out. She was growing numb with the cold, but all her being was concentrated on finding Eleanor, and it seemed as though some invisible power was guiding her hand when she groped in the darkness.

Eleanor, wild with terror, struck out, and, flinging her arms about Sheila's neck, dragged both of them below the surface.

Sheila fought that choking grasp from about her, knowing that Eleanor, in her frantic terror, was incapable of reasoned thought. It was no time for gentle measures, so she tugged at the other's hair to keep her head above the water, and struck out for the bank.

She was vaguely conscious of voices, and of an electric light flashing.

"Here—quick, someone—take this——"

"Barbara, don't go in!"

It was Stella Stone taking charge, and Barbara Redfern, contrary to orders, waded cut into the stream, and catching Sheila, dragged her up. Clara and Jemima followed her, making a chain by linked hands. Then Stella Stone took Eleanor in her strong arms and placed her down on the bank.

"Oh, my word—all right, Sheila?" gasped Barbara.

Sheila, a little dazed still, nodded her head.

There was a small crowd on the bank and they did everything possible. Barbara, Clara, and Jemima took off their thick coats

to enwrap the two girls, and Stella applied artificial respiration to Eleanor.

As for Sheila, she was made to run up and down to restore her circulation, supported on either side by Barbara and Clara.

"What happened?" asked Marcia Loftus.

"Goodness knows—except that Sheila was saving Eleanor," said Barbara. "And that's enough to be going on with."

"I should think so," panted Clara. "Good old Sheila!"

"Shan't let them expel you after this!" said Jemima. "Can't be done——"

Circulation restored, Sheila was allowed to rest for a moment while she was warmly wrapped in coats. Isabel Drake, of the Sixth Form, had run back to the road to intercept Miss Primrose's car which was due to pass by in a moment, and it was to the road they all went now.

There was the car waiting.

"Eleanor's come round," said Sheila.

"Help me carry her, someone."

Phyllis Howell and Grace Woodfield, of the Fifth Form, gave the required assistance, and it was not long before Eleanor, frightened out of her wits, was put in the back of the car with Sheila and then raced back to the school.

Barbara, Jemima, Clara, and the others watched the car go and turned for school again.

"Well, my goodness, what an end to it!" said Barbara. "Sheila told me that Eleanor fell in."

"Well, what was Eleanor doing there?" Mabel Lynn wanted to know. "She bolted off at once, of course, but not to save Sheila."

Clara laughed shortly.

"Has she ever given a sign of wanting to save Sheila? My hat! Sheila's a brick!"

"Hear, hear!"

That Sheila was a brick was everyone's thought, and at Cliff House the news of what had happened quickly spread. Sheila had saved her enemy. At risk of her own life she had saved Eleanor from drowning, and at the same time had encompassed her own capture.

In the Fourth Form dormitory there was seething excitement.

"If Sheila's expelled after this," said Clara, standing on her bed, "I've a jolly good mind to get up a deputation to Miss Prim!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Any girl who doesn't agree?" asked Clara, and looked at Marcia Loftus.

Marcia Loftus said not a word.

Whether or not Miss Primrose would take any notice of a deputation from the Fourth Form was doubtful, but probably there would be no such need. The headmistress herself had not remained unaffected by the brave rescue.

At the very moment when the Fourth-Formers were agreeing with Clara, Miss Primrose was in the sanatorium, whither the two girls had been taken.

Sheila, however, was no worse for the ordeal through which she had passed, but Eleanor, on the other hand, was shivering and seemed to be delirious.

The school sanatorium contained only those two girls, and it seemed strange to Sheila that she should be sharing a ward with her enemy. Herself, she was warm and cosy, although very far from happy, as she watched Miss Primrose in earnest consultation with the matron.

Presently Miss Primrose crossed to her bed, and her face bore a kindly smile.

"Sheila, my dear, you have been very brave indeed. I understand that Eleanor fell into the stream, and you rescued her?"

"Yes, Miss Primrose. But anyone else would have done the same. Babs or Clara

"That does not alter the fact that you acted very bravely. In the circumstances, I really feel——" But Miss Primrose did not pursue that train of thought, although her words quickened Sheila's heart and brought a flush of colour to her cheeks. For what did the words imply but that the headmistress was likely to change her decision?

"Eleanor was chasing you?" Miss Primrose asked at last.

"She was following me—yes, Miss Primrose, and I dodged her. Then apparently—well, she fell into the stream."

"I see. You are feeling exhausted, of course—feverish?"

"I feel all right, Miss Primrose, thank you."

A moment later Miss Primrose went away, and Sheila, her heart heavy within her, lay without movement. Here she was, back at Cliff House. Suppose even that she were not to be expelled—would it mean

they did not think her a thief, or would it just be a reward for bravery?

She knew quite well that the fact that she had acted bravely would not alter Miss Primrose's decision regarding the pendant. She would still be thought a thief—a thief, but a brave thief. And if she were not to be expelled, would she be justified in bringing Captain Hargraves into it?

It really seemed as though she would be worse off now than she had been before. She would have to remain at Cliff House with that dreadful cloud for ever over her head.

And then she heard Eleanor in the next bed muttering:

"I must—I must—I must catch her! I must—I must catch her—Sheila—Sheila——"

Sheila sat up in bed. The matron was no longer in the sanatorium ward. There was a night-light burning, casting rather eerie shadows across the room. How strange Eleanor's voice sounded, too.

"Yes, Eleanor, Sheila is here," she called softly.

But Eleanor did not seem to hear her. Her mind was working automatically.

"I must catch her. I must——"
Eleanor's voice took on a frantic note now.

There was no calming her. To speak to her was worse than to say nothing, and when the matron entered a moment later Sheila was glad.

"Oh, matron," she said, "I think Eleanor is delirious!"

"Oh, dear, dear! Poor child! You haven't talked to her?"

"I did try to answer her, but she didn't understand what I said."

"Then you had better not talk. When she is better, and knows you are here, it will calm her. She had a bad shock. I'm afraid she's highly strung."

How like Eleanor it was! Her experience had been no more severe than Sheila's, but she had collapsed utterly, and now would be a centre of attention. The doctor was on his way; and, of course, Eleanor, even when she was a little better, would like being the invalid—being the centre of attention.

The doctor shook his head gravely over Eleanor when he came, and said something about shock, ordered hot-water bottles, and

said she must be kept perfectly quiet. Sheila he smiled upon.

"Not much wrong with you—oh? And so you were the heroine? Brave girl! Wouldn't get me diving into a stream at this time of night! You'll be right as rain in the morning—right as rain!"

Then he gave instructions to the matron, waved his hand jovially to Sheila, and departed.

Right as rain indeed! Certainly she would be up and about with nothing to show for her ducking; but then she had a good hold on herself, and wasn't hysterical.

But if only the doctor had known the truth! If only he had known her state of mind! She was terrified of the morning, for in the morning what was to happen? Expulsion, or just suffered to stay on because they thought she was brave?

Nevertheless, for all her worry, Sheila soon fell asleep; and, probably because she was so worn out with the troubled day, her sleep was calm.

CHAPTER 25.

Too Cunning by Far.

"FEELING O.K., Sheila?" asked Barbara Redfern.

"Yes, Barbara, thanks!"

But there was a worried look in Sheila's eyes, nevertheless. Barbara, Jemima, and Clara had come to the sanatorium as a deputation on behalf of the Fourth Form to express goodwill and admiration for her bravery.

"Well, I dare say Miss Primrose's news has bucked you up," Barbara smiled.

"News? Miss Primrose only asked how I was."

"Didn't she tell you that—well, she's going to put everything before the governors with a recommendation that you are not expelled?"

Sheila gave a little gasp of surprise, and Eleanor, in the next bed, ceased her mumbling, and quite forgot for the moment to be delirious.

"Not expelled? Oh—oh, she didn't say anything. Is it just because of what happened last night?" Sheila asked.

"Yes, rather! And so it ought to be, too! It was ripping of you!"

The matron came along then.

"Now, now," she said. "I think you had better go, if you cannot talk in

whispers. The other poor child is delirious again, I think."

Barbara & Co. fell silent, and looked at Eleanor, whose face was pale, and whose eyes were closed, but who was tossing restlessly from side to side of her bed.

Barbara looked at Jemima, and Jemima frowned in perplexity.

"I think you had better go," said the matron.

There was no chance of protesting, and regretfully the three girls bade Sheila good-bye.

"But I don't want you to think me a thief," she pleaded. "Just because I rescued Eleanor doesn't alter that. If you still believe I'm a thief it won't make me any happier that you think me brave."

"Silly goose!" said Barbara noncommittally, and yet very uncomfortably.

That was all the reply that Sheila received, and she sank back on to her bed, her heart heavy as lead. Eleanor's mumblings had ceased.

"If you would like to get up and dress, you may," said the matron. "Miss Primrose has given you permission, and I think that Eleanor will be better by herself. But you must promise not to leave the school."

That was what Sheila wanted; she was not ill, and, lying in bed, she felt a prisoner. She wanted to walk about—she would walk and walk and walk backwards and forwards across the fields, and clear her mind.

As soon as she was dressed in clothes that had been brought from the dormitory, she descended the stairs, and therefore she did not encounter Miss Primrose, who entered the sanatorium a few minutes after Sheila left.

Eleanor was much quieter, her delirium seemed to have passed, and she was conscious.

"Eleanor, I have sent for your mother, and she will arrive early this afternoon. You were mentioning her in your delirium last night, nurse tells me."

Eleanor, who had tried to look very ill at mention of the fact that her mother had been sent for, now sat up—so great was her surprise. But she instantly relapsed with the proper show of weakness.

"Oh, I am glad!" she said weakly.

But that was not at all the way she felt about her mother's arrival. Her mind at once ran feverishly over all possibilities.

There would be mention of the pendant! Her mother would know the truth at once. What was to be done? What was there to do?

Her heart beat furiously, and she was literally shaking with fear. She was in a state of terror. It would all come out about the pendant now. Suppose her mother learned that there were two pendants—that the one Sheila had was engraved with the name of Angela, the missing aunt!

When Miss Primrose had gone Eleanor was really in a highly nervous state. There was no need for affectation, as she was alone. She bit her lip incessantly and looked up at the ceiling, clasping and unclasping her hands restlessly.

Her mother would learn the truth. Her mother would connect Sheila with Aunt Angela, and would want to know where the pendant came from. Then Sheila would be brought into it. Then the next thing would surely be that Captain Hargraves would be mentioned. Everything would come out—everything.

And when it was known that Sheila had the pendant from Captain Hargraves, she would no longer be accused of theft. Perhaps then it would be realised that she—Eleanor—had planned it all.

Eleanor went pale with terror. "Mother mustn't come—mother mustn't!" she whispered in despair.

Was there nothing she could do now to prevent her mother's arrival? Could she prevent Miss Primrose from learning the truth?

Her mind was in a whirl. Suppose she begged Miss Primrose not to mention the pendant? Would the wish of a poor sick girl be granted?

Better still, supposed she muttered it in feigned delirium?

It was a wild idea, but in her desperation it seemed to Eleanor the only possible course to adopt. And, hearing the matron, she closed her eyes and rolled her head from side to side on the pillow.

"Mother mustn't know—mother mustn't know—" she mumbled.

The matron was near the bed, listening.

"Mother mustn't know about the pendant—she must not! Mother must not know about the pendant—"

And all the while she kept telling her-

self that this would do it. To spare her they would keep quiet about the pendant—or her mother would not be told. Oh, how clever she was!

"Mother—must—not be told—about the pendant—" muttered Eleanor, a little more distinctly.

Then she heard the matron whisper: "Sh-sh!"

There was a whispering near her bed. "Delirious again, poor child! This is how she was last night. Thank goodness, you have come, Mrs. Lawton!"

Eleanor opened her eyes, blinked, and stared, then went off into a faint as she saw standing beside the bed—her mother!

CHAPTER 25.

The Mystery Clears.

ELEANOR was not pretending now. She really had fainted, and her mother, standing by the bedside, was greatly distressed.

"What is it about the pendant?" she asked. "Poor child! There's something on her mind."

"I think it's the matter of the theft," Miss Primrose said gravely. "I had not intended to mention it. Eleanor is apparently very disturbed about it, and on another girl's account."

"Yes, the dear child has a very generous nature," nodded Mrs. Lawton. "If she did not wish me to hear anything about it, then perhaps it need not be mentioned."

"A girl is to be expelled for the theft," Miss Primrose said—"the girl who was in the stream with Eleanor. It was Eleanor's pendant that was stolen. It really shows a very forgiving nature."

Mrs. Lawton could not repress a start of surprise.

"Eleanor's pendant? But she had no pendant."

"Not a diamond pendant?" exclaimed Miss Primrose, and it was her turn to look surprised then. "Surely Eleanor has a pendant? Why, the other girl is accused of stealing it."

Mrs. Lawton was somewhat pale now. "I'm afraid Eleanor has been naughty. The pendant is mine—a very valuable one. She must have borrowed it during the last holiday."

Not a word did she say about Eleanor's

having denied taking the pendant, for that was a domestic affair which did not concern Miss Primrose. But Mrs. Lawton's face, nevertheless, wore an exceedingly troubled look, and it was obvious that she was distressed.

"Would it be possible for me to see the pendant, Miss Primrose? I don't like the idea of its being left about anywhere."

Then Mrs. Lawton took her place beside her daughter's bed and stroked Eleanor's forehead tenderly. For all her wickedness, Eleanor was not denied her mother's love. Mrs. Lawton was very fond of her daughter, and quite blind to her faults.

Miss Primrose was not so blind, and her face wore a peculiar expression. She realised why it was that Eleanor had not mentioned the loss of the pendant sooner. But whatever wrong Eleanor had done, Sheila's theft was not excused.

Miss Primrose went down the stairs from the sanatorium and into the quadrangle. Morning lessons had ended, and the girls were now crowding into the quadrangle.

Phyllis Howell and Philippa Derwent were on their way to play tennis when the headmistress intercepted them.

"Please tell Barbara that I wish to see her—oh, and Sheila!"

Phyllis took the message, hurrying back to the school as fast as possible without running—running being forbidden.

"Babs—anyone seen Babs?" she asked, on meeting Clara in the Hall.

"Upstairs with Sheila—in Study No. 11."

Phyllis ran up the stairs and burst open the door of Study No. 11. Barbara was there, talking to Sheila, who was packing her things.

"Miss Prim wants you both—at once—just outside sunny!" panted Phyllis, and fled back to her tennis.

Barbara looked anxiously at Sheila, who grimaced.

"Better come and see what Miss Prim does want," suggested Barbara glumly. But she paused on the threshold. "Sheila," she said, "I can't believe you're a thief—I simply can't!"

She put out her hand.

Sheila took it in silence, but a lump came into her throat.

"I'm not a thief, Babs. Perhaps I can explain it all. Only—only there's someone else I didn't want to drag into it. Of course I'm not a thief."

In a moment or two they were with Miss Primrose.

"Do either of you know where Eleanor keeps her pendant?" was her unexpected question.

"She has a jewel-box, Miss Primrose," Barbara said. "It's sure to be in there."

"Then please go and get the box."

And with that the mistress went back into the sanatorium.

Babs and Sheila re-entered the school building and went to Eleanor's study. The jewel-box was not to be seen at first; but a brief search unearthed it hidden behind some small books on the bookcase, and Barbara took possession of it.

When Miss Primrose received the jewel-case she took it into the sanatorium. Eleanor was by this time conscious of her surroundings and of her mother's presence.

"Where are your keys, dear?" asked her mother.

"Keys, mother?"

Eleanor's voice was startled, and yet she knew. Her mother had obviously overheard her remark about the pendant.

"Yes, dear; I have your jewel-case here."

Mrs. Lawton's voice was unusually stern, and Eleanor wondered what line of action she had better pursue.

"Oh, mother, I—I've got a confession to make! It's been worrying me so! I—I borrowed your pendant, and then another girl stole it, and I was too frightened to say anything. But I've got it back."

"Oh!" Mrs. Lawton fought back her sternness. "Well, I shall have something to say to you about that later. For the moment you had better let me have the pendant."

"Yes, mother, but it's not in the jewel-case. It—it's in my writing-case in the study."

"My pendant—in a writing-case! Eleanor!"

"I—I'm sorry, mother, but it's safer there. You see, anyone would think it was in the jewel-case—"

"Is that the only thing of mine you have taken?"

"Yes, mother—oh, yes!" cried Eleanor.

She sat up in bed now, thoroughly frightened lest the jewel-case were opened. It was not that she had anything else of her mother's in it, but that one of the pendants was there—and the very one she did not want her mother to see.

"Are you telling me the truth, Eleanor?"

"Yes, mother—yes. You know I am."

"You seem very eager to take the jewel-case. You mustn't snatch it, dear."

Miss Primrose, standing by, looked very grim indeed.

"I think it had better be opened. Eleanor, give your mother the keys."

"Oh, but—but—"

And then Eleanor, with a last desperate hope of saving herself, did get the keys, unlocked the jewel-case, and then gave a little gasp.

"Why, the pendant is here! Oh, good! I must have moved it."

She held up the pendant so that it winked in the light. If only her mother took it without scrutiny—if only she did not look at the name on the back.

"And what else is in the box?" asked Miss Primrose.

Eleanor turned out the box on to the counterpane. There was nothing else of her mother's there.

"Let me put the pendant on you, mother," she said cunningly, for that would hide the name completely.

"No, dear. I want to know that it's quite safe. Yes, the diamonds are all in their settings—"

Mrs. Lawton, having turned over the pendant in her hand, stared at it in perplexity. Then:

"This is not my pendant at all," she exclaimed.

Miss Primrose started.

"Not your pendant, Mrs. Lawton?"

Eleanor fell back on the bed, stunned.

"It—it must be yours, mother. I took it from your box."

"Nonsense, dear." Mrs. Lawton examined the pendant, a heavy frown on her eyes. "Really, I cannot make this out. The pendant is a duplicate of mine—"

"Why, then—then the other girl must have stolen it!" exclaimed Miss Primrose. "If there are two she may have obtained this elsewhere. She must have."

"In which case, where is mine?" asked Mrs. Lawton. "This pendant I know well. I must find out where it came from. That is important."

"Then I will get the girl, and you shall question her," Miss Primrose said, and went from the sanatorium.

A moment or two later she returned ac-

companied by Sheila, who looked pale and anxious.

"Will you please look at this pendant?" Miss Primrose requested.

Sheila looked from the bed where Eleanor lay to Mrs. Lawton, and she trembled as she saw the pendant. What was to come now, she wondered. Was this some new accusation?

"Will you tell me where you found this?" asked Mrs. Lawton.

"I didn't find it," said Sheila.

"Well, where you obtained it, then?" replied Miss Primrose sharply. "Mrs. Lawton has an important reason for asking."

"The pendant was in the possession of Eleanor's aunt, and we've lost touch with her," said Mrs. Lawton. "It has her name on the back."

How Sheila stared!

"But, Mrs. Lawton, I thought it was yours. I had it given to me, and—and I thought—I couldn't understand it at all, because it seemed the same as—well, as the one that Eleanor had."

"No, no, this is not the same," said Mrs. Lawton. "There are two pendants exactly alike. My husband's mother had them as ear-rings, and then they were made into two pendants—Eleanor's aunt and I had one each. This is hers, not mine."

"But—but that isn't the pendant that was in the writing-case?"

"This was in the jewel-case."

Sheila could hardly control her excitement. There was a pendant in the writing-case still; and there had apparently been one in the jewel-case. Not only were there two, but both were in the school.

"I had that pendant given to me by Captain Hargraves," she said. "I did not wish him brought into it. He's an officer who was blinded in the War, and has lost his memory. I—I don't know where he got the pendant. I thought that perhaps he might have bought it from someone, or had it given to him; and that it had been stolen from Eleanor, but that he didn't know it, and so—"

"So that was why you said nothing," exclaimed Miss Primrose. "You were willing to risk expulsion rather than bring him into it."

Sheila went crimson.

"He's blind; and I thought he had troubles enough. Besides, as I didn't steal it, I didn't think I could be expelled."

Miss Primrose put her hand on Sheila's shoulder.

"My dear girl," she said, "of course you won't be expelled. If you'd explained matters before, there would never have been any question about it."

"I'm sorry, Miss Primrose. I tried to act for the best."

Mrs. Lawton looked confused, and gave Eleanor a most peculiar side-glance.

"My pendant is in the writing-case, then, Eleanor?"

Sheila looked away. It seemed to her now that Eleanor was to get her just deserts. She had known that there were two pendants, and had allowed the false charge of theft to go on.

But Eleanor was too cunning.

"Fancy, the pendant was in the jewel-case all the time!" she said. "Oh, dear, I am sorry she was accused of theft!"

She was going to say Sheila, but she was frightened that her mother would guess the truth, and so guess the motive for her conduct.

"You were very careless, then," said Miss Primrose.

"I—I didn't know there were two," whimpered Eleanor. "It's exactly like the other. And—and she wouldn't explain."

"We will go into that later," Miss Primrose said. "For the moment will you give Mrs. Lawton Captain Hargraves' address? Eleanor seems to have made a remarkable recovery, Mrs. Lawton, and I feel sure you could leave her to go to the village."

"Captain Hargraves lives in Courtfield, Miss Primrose," Sheila put in. "I'll give you the address."

Mrs. Lawton was trembling with excitement.

"I really think my brother-in-law is found at last. He must have had the pendant with him during the War. And now—now, if we can only find his wife, the reunion will be complete. Goodness has come out of evil!"

CHAPTER 27.

Sheila's Great Day.

MRS. LAWTON had gone from the sanatorium, but Miss Primrose, Eleanor, and Sheila remained.

"Now," said Miss Primrose grimly, "I think I will go into this more

closely. Did you know that there were two pendants, Eleanor?"

"No, Miss Primrose. Really!"

"How did you imagine that yours was lost if it was in the jewel-case? Did you not look there?"

"Yes, really I did, Miss Primrose. And it wasn't there. If I'd known there were two I wouldn't have accused Sheila of theft."

"I trust not," said Miss Primrose, and gave Eleanor a keen and steady glance. "Did you write and tell your mother that the pendant was lost?"

"I did write, Miss Primrose, but the letter must have got lost in the post."

"Eleanor, how dare you tell me such palpable untruths! You took the pendant from your mother's jewel-case, and if it had not been found you would not have said another word. What is that but stealing?"

"Oh, Miss Primrose, I didn't! Oh dear, my head's aching so, I don't know what I'm saying!"

"No, you want time to think out a fabrication," said Miss Primrose curtly. "I will have a serious talk with your mother about you, Eleanor."

The headmistress turned away and beckoned to Sheila to follow her. But Eleanor made wild signs behind the headmistress' back.

"What is it?" asked Sheila quietly.

"Explain for me," whispered Eleanor anxiously. "Think of something to say—you know—" she stopped as Miss Primrose looked back, and then assumed the wearied, worn-out look of an invalid.

As for Sheila, her breath was quite taken away by that plea. She was to tell lies for Eleanor; she was to think of an elaborate story which would make Eleanor's part in all this seem innocent, natural, and all for the best! Really, that was the limit, even for Eleanor.

Sheila shrugged her shoulders and walked out of the room.

Outside, Miss Primrose put an arm round her shoulders. Sheila was amazed. Miss Primrose had always seemed to her rather severe, and not a person to show any emotion.

"Sheila, my dear," said Miss Primrose, "I have nothing but praise and admiration for the way in which you have comported yourself in most difficult and trying circumstances. I know you're not a thief, and I

wish to say how sorry I am that I believed the charge against you!"

"Thank you, Miss Primrose. I—I don't mind now that it is all over."

"But it's not quite all over, Sheila; I'm convinced that Eleanor has played a most wicked part in all this."

"I—I—" Sheila began, but Miss Primrose interrupted her.

"I know you're trying to say something for Eleanor. There's nothing to be said. Come now, there goes the dinner-bell. You will go in with your Form."

Sheila went out into the sunshine, and there were tears in her eyes; tears of happiness. It seemed as though a tremendous weight had been lifted from her shoulders. Cleared! She was no longer under a cloud, no longer scorned.

A crowd of girls were going into the schoolhouse, and she ran after them, dabbing the tears from her eyes.

Everyone was amazed, a few moments later, when Miss Primrose called the dining-room to order, and then made a short speech; but the speech amazed them still more.

"Girls, I wish to express publicly my regret that Sheila Wynn was falsely accused of theft. The charge against her is unreservedly withdrawn. I hope that recompense will be made to Sheila for what she has suffered. This can best be ensured by giving her convincing demonstration of your

"Hip, hip—" began Clara, but was instantly silenced.

"Far from being a thief, Sheila is a heroine," went on Miss Primrose. "A girl of whom Cliff House may be proud. Now, girls—"

Stella Stone rose from her seat.

"Hip, hip—"

"HURRAH!"

Sheila was thumped on the back and patted, and had her hand shaken by everyone, was hugged and even kissed! It was her great moment. She was the heroine of the school—and all the more a heroine because of what she had wrongfully been made to suffer.

She was happier at that moment than she had ever been before. If only her mother could hear those cheers; if only her father—but that thought was sadness, the only touch of sadness in the whole affair.

She thanked good fortune as she resumed

her seat and calmness came. that Captain Hargraves would not have cause to wonder why she had been expelled. Rather would he have cause now for happiness, since it was she who had been instrumental in bringing about the glad reunion that would mean so much to him.

CHAPTER 28.

A Wonderful Reunion.

"HEARD the news?"
Jemima Carstairs put her head in at the door of Sheila's study that afternoon after lessons, and her face was gleaming with excitement.

"News? No," said Sheila; but she knew at once that it was good news.

Clara and Marjorie came along together to hear, and Jemima addressed all three.

"Captain Hargraves, I've just heard," she went on, "is really Eleanor's uncle. Apparently he lost his memory, and was given any old name, or one they thought suited him, you know. But all's well."

"Oh, I'm glad!" cried Sheila. "He will be so happy now. How marvellous!"

"Yes, it's just splendid," agreed Clara. "I don't know him, but I wish him luck."

"And what will happen? He—he won't go away?" said Sheila, a sudden cold fear taking possession of her.

"What-ho! He'll go back with Mrs. Lawton," Jemima said. "The place in Courtfield will be closed up. Sorry to lose him— Why, what's the matter, Sheila?"

Sheila turned away her head.
"My hat! She's crying!" Clara exclaimed.

"I'm glad!" Sheila said. "That's all."
"Well, it's certainly good," admitted Clara. "Give him my congratulations."

And Clara hurried away. Marjorie went with her; and Sheila, thinking they were all gone, dabbed at her eyes.

Jemima's gentle voice came to her.
"Sheila—not crying?"

"Oh dear! I'm sorry, Jemima. It's horrid of me, I know. I'm not thinking of Captain Hargraves so much as of myself, and that's mean, and—"

"Of yourself? I see. Poor old you!" said Jemima. "You'll miss him, of course."

"I—I—you see, now this is all over, I thought I could go and see him; and

there's so much I want to tell him. He seems such a friend. He'd understand my point of view. But now he's going away, and I shan't even be able to say good-bye!"

"Can't be allowed," said Jemima, polishing her monocle. "I shan't let him go; and I don't suppose he will go without saying good-bye."

Sheila turned to look at Jemima, her eyes shining.

"Oh, Jemima! Do you really mean that? You think he will come here?" Then her face fell. "Why should he?" she asked. "I'm nothing to him. Just someone who used to read aloud to him."

"He never forgets anyone who's kind," Jemima said. "Besides, Mrs. Lawton is sure to return to the school with him. Cheer up! You can write him long letters and buck him up, you know. He can have them read to him."

Sheila went rather red.

"There's something else. I know I'm being horrid and petty; but, Jemima, I can't bear to think of Eleanor as his niece. To think that he should be her uncle! She'll play mean tricks, I know. She'll take advantage of the fact that he's blind; and, besides, she'll put him against me."

"Um!" said Jemima. "But so long as you're both at school it's O.K." "But—but she may not be here," said Sheila. "I'm afraid that Miss Primrose—well, she's taken a rather serious view of it all."

"Not surprising."

Jemima put her arm round Sheila and hugged her.

"Buck up! Evil never really prospers, you know. You've come through this all right—chin up, like a brick; and Captain Hargraves will think all the world of you when he hears about it."

"Hears about it?"

"Yes, of course," said Jemima, in surprise. "He'll have to know. I couldn't stop my tongue from wagging. I won't mention names; but he's going to know what a brick you are, although it's my idea he knows already."

Sheila braced herself up.

"Sorry I've made all this fuss, Jemima. But you do understand? Oh, I do want you to understand, Jemima."

"Of course. Perhaps we shall be able to get Captain Hargraves to the banquet?"

Jemima's eyes were twinkling, and Sheila,

at mention of a banquet, looked at her in a startled way.

"Banquet—what banquet?"

Jemima took her by the arm and led her to the window.

"Look! See that procession?"

Sheila could not help seeing that procession. Barbara, Mabel, Clara, Marjorie—and, of course, fat Bessie Bunter—were coming across the quadrangle, their arms laden.

"Jemima, why——"

"Ssh! Secret," said Jemima, putting her fingers to her lips. "In honour of a very popular girl. I'll give you three guesses. And now I'm off to do my share."

Jemima disappeared, and Sheila sat down in the armchair. A banquet for her—in her honour! How different from her status a few days ago!

Standing at the window, a few moments later, she saw a limousine enter the school gates, and her heart leapt as she saw Mrs. Lawton alight, and then Captain Hargraves.

Sheila's first impulse was to run down into the quadrangle, and then she remembered there was much to be done first. Captain Hargraves would have to meet Eleanor. There would be private matters to discuss. But she did not move from the window. It was only a moment later that Mrs. Lawton emerged from the sanatorium, entered the car, and was driven in it to the schoolhouse door. She was coming inside.

Then Sheila heard Jemima's voice.

"Yes, this is the door, Mrs. Lawton. Sheila!"

Sheila drew back as Mrs. Lawton entered, and then an amazing thing happened. Mrs. Lawton, tears in her eyes, advanced, arms outstretched.

"Sheila! I've found you at last!"

Sheila was in Mrs. Lawton's arms next instant, being hugged and kissed, but she was quite dazed, and did not understand.

"Kiss your aunt," said Jemima, who stood in the doorway.

"My—my aunt!"

Sheila's eyes widened.

"Your aunt, dear, of course," said Mrs. Lawton. "Eleanor—she—she has told me that she thinks you're her cousin. It occurred to her suddenly—if you're Sheila Wynn—and if your mother's name is Angela."

"Yes—yes it is!" said Sheila, simply panting with excitement. "And that's why Eleanor asked."

"Eleanor asked you? But she told me she did not know your mother's name."

"Oh, aunt, I didn't guess! Mother will be so happy! But—but then, Eleanor is my cousin?"

"Yes, dear, and Captain Hargraves——"

"Oh, of course, he is my uncle!" cried Sheila. She trembled with excitement.

"Oh, aunt, how marvellous!"

"But he is not your uncle, dear," said her aunt gently.

"Oh!" Sheila's face fell.

"Not your uncle, my dear; he is your father!"

"My father!" Sheila stood as one in a trance. "My father! Captain Hargraves my father! Oh, aunt, aunt!"

And then there came a step in the corridor; the door opened, and there stood Captain Hargraves, Sheila's father.

Silently then Jemima, who had guided him thither, and Mrs. Lawton stole away to leave father and daughter together.

What a reunion it was! Sheila, in her study, kissed and hugged the man she now knew was her father.

"Oh, what will mummy say? Oh, what will she say? She'll be so happy, she won't know what to do!"

"Poor mother!" said her father softly. "And to think I did not know you, Sheila! But the shock has restored my memory.

I can remember everything—piece all the loose ends together. No wonder I was so fond of you, Sheila darling!"

"And when are we to go to mummy?"

"Aunt Muriel is going first to break the news, and then we're going to drive to her. Oh, my darling Sheila, this is the happiest day of my life!"

"And mine!" cried Sheila. "And you won't ever go away from mother and me again?"

"Never, never! And the doctor told me that any great shock, such as joy, might restore my sight. It will come back to me. I know it will. It was a shock that drove it away, and now—— I've been afraid to say anything, but—but——"

"Daddy!"

Sheila gripped his arms,

"Yes, Sheila, I can see—I can see you, but it still seems so dark——"

"Of course it does. Of course, there's no light on, and we've let the fire go out. Look——"

In a moment the light was on, and he covered his eyes against the dazzling brilliance. He could see—that movement alone told the story. Sheila, understanding, put the light low again, and then flung her arms round his neck.

"It's a bad dream ended, that's all," he said huskily. "We're all together again, Sheila, in the most marvellous way. Through a long, twisty tunnel we've come to happiness. Never, never again will we be unhappy!"

"Never, never again!" echoed Sheila.

There they remained in the half-light, close together—pals. Then, some minutes later, came a gentle tap at the door. Jemima it was, and Sheila went to the door, whispered the great, glad news, and pulled Jemima inside.

"Welcome, Jemima! I can just see you, too, my friend," said Sheila's father. "I must see you all. Sheila and I have been weeping with happiness; now we——"

"Now you must come to the banquet," said Jemima. "If—that is, if you want to."

Sheila looked at her father, and her father was now able to look back at her. Of course they would go to the banquet!

So to the banquet they went. And what a banquet it was! No one mentioned Eleanor, no one really thought of her at all, so there was nothing to spoil their happiness.

But Eleanor, in the sanatorium, had found that her retribution had come too late. Too late she had told the truth about Sheila to save herself. On the morrow she would leave Cliff House for ever, at Miss Primrose's request.

One girl had found happiness and another disgrace; but who could say that either had not received her deserts?

THE END.

FOUR more splendid numbers of "The Schoolgirls' Own" Library will be on sale on Thursday, Oct. 1st.
See page iv of cover.

SOME AUTUMN GAMES FOR GUIDES.

Now that September is here the ground will soon be carpeted with leaves fallen from trees and with these leaves there are many jolly games that a Guide can play which will prove as instructive to her as they are entertaining.

Secure as many different specimens of tree-leaves as you can find, and on returning to headquarters, sort out the different specimens and keep only the best.

Now mount the specimens that you decide to keep on postcards, and in one corner of the card print a small number—not larger than your thumb.

Someone should make a list of the names of the leaves on a separate piece of paper, the number on your list, of course, corresponding with the number on the card, i.e., No. 1 Elm, No. 2 Oak, etc. etc.

Put those cards away for a few weeks and one winter's evening bring them out.

Let someone hold each of the cards for a space of a minute so that everyone can see the leaf, but let the holder have her thumb over the number. Let those playing the game write down the name of the tree to which they believe the leaf belongs.

Let the holder of the card, who can also have the key-list of the names and numbers of the leaves, make an accurate list of the names of the leaves in the order she shows them.

After one card has been held up for a full minute, let it be put away, and another shown.

When ten cards have been thus exhibited, let the person who held them up read out their correct names, and you'll be surprised how many of you have mistaken elm leaves for lime leaves and made other mistakes.

Have you an artist in your troupe, or a Guide who can trace tolerably neatly?

Let her trace round the outline of your mounted leaves, and accurately (accuracy is very important, of course,) fill in the details, veins, etc. in the leaf.

Get her, or them, (if there is more than

one Guide capable of the job all the better for it is a long task), to make four copies of each kind of leaf, on post-cards all of the same size and colour.

Now you have a set of "Snap" cards. They should be well shuffled and dealt out, just like Snap cards, but the players of this game will have to know their leaves very well to be the first to call Snap at the right time, and not at the wrong.

As in Snap, the first to call rightly takes her opponents' cards, and anyone who calls wrongly puts her cards in the pool to be won by the first Guide to call Snap-pool.

Yet another game is played with two sets of copies of various kinds of leaves—it is better to play with copies, as the original mounted leaves will get damaged.

A set of say ten different tree leaves are shuffled, and dealt to ten different girls standing in a line on one side of the drill hall, facing the wall.

An exactly similar set is dealt to another ten Guides standing in a line on the other side of the hall, also facing the wall.

When each girl gets her card she pins it on her chest or to her Guide scarf, where, it can be plainly seen.

The Guide captain, or person in charge of the game, places two chairs close together at one end of the hall, equal distance from both lines of Guides.

Then she calls:

"About turn!"

Each Guide then looks for her leaf amongst the other batch of Guides. They may run towards each other, and there will be much bustle and excitement whilst the search is made. The cards should not have the name of the leaf upon it. Identity should be recognised purely by knowing the leaf, or comparing one card with another.

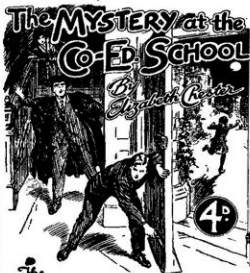
When two girls wearing the same leaf find each other, they link arms and race for the chairs. The first pair to be seated, wins.

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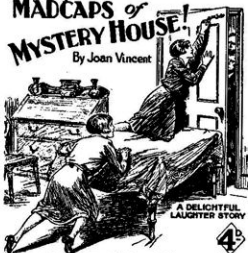
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