

THE ONLY GIRLS' SCHOOL-STORY PAPER PUBLISHED!

THE SCHOOL FRIEND

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WHO HAS WRECKED STUDY No. 4?

(An incident from the Magnificent, Long, Complete Tale of the Girls of Cliff House, contained in this issue.)

A Visit From Aunt Betsy.



Add Soup to Taste.

"I SAY, you're spoiling that stuff!" Bessie Bunter blinked indignantly at Dolly Jobling.

"Oh, run away, Fatima!" snapped Dolly crossly.

"You'll ruin it!" retorted Bessie.

Dolly Jobling had a bubbling pot over the fire burning in the "Cosy Corner" at the end of the Fourth Form passage at Cliff House.

Dolly rather fancied herself as a cook. Her companions in Study No. 7 did not quite share her opinion, but they tolerated Dolly's efforts.

Nevertheless, they were not sorry that, since fires had been abolished in the studies, Dolly had to go out into the passage to do her cooking.

The sound of the bubbling pot attracted Bessie Bunter. She gazed moodily at Dolly's efforts.

"It's enough to make anyone spoil a thing!" snapped Dolly, gazing at Bessie's fat face. "Why don't you leave me alone?"

"It's a pity to waste good food!"

"Who's wasting food?"

"You are! You don't know— Yarooooogh! Look out!"

Bessie Bunter bolted hastily for Study No. 4.

Dolly Jobling had snatched a hot spoon from the pot, and evidently intended to repel boarders.

The door of Study No. 4 slammed, and Bessie dropped moodily into a chair. But she did not remain long there.

Bessie's fat, red face locked out into the corridor again. Dolly was stirring her pot in a positively affectionate manner.

Bessie approached the cooking cautiously.

"I say, Dolly—" commenced Bessie.

"You back, Fatima!" said Dolly sharply. "You'll get the hot spoon next time!"

"Oh, really, Dolly," protested Bessie. "I only want to see that you don't spoil — I mean that you make it as nice as possible!"

"Oh!"

"Now, if you added a little dripping, and a little salt—"

"Fathead!" snapped Dolly.

"Who's a fathead?" demanded the fat junior. "I tell you—"

"Don't!"

"But if you only—"

"Don't want to!"

Bessie blinked indignantly.

"It won't be worth eating!" she protested.

"You won't be asked to eat it!" returned Dolly meaningly.

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"No one else will eat it!" snapped Bessie venomously. "It'll poison the dog!"

"What?"

"Never saw such a mess in all my— Yooooop! Leggo!"

Bessie sprang back hurriedly, but not before Dolly had seized hold of her plait.

"Yarooooogh!" roared the fat junior, struggling for freedom.

"I'll teach you to interfere!" snapped the amateur cook. "You couldn't boil a kettle of water without burning it!"

"Fibber! Yoop! Wait till I get free!" howled Bessie, struggling vainly to free her plait.

"You're a nasty little thing!"

"Yarooooogh!"

"And if you don't go away I'll hurt you!"

"Yow! You are hurting!" gasped Bessie. "How can I go away, you little cat—I mean, Dolly dear? Yarooooogh!"

"Tug!"

"Yooooop!"

"Tug, tug!"

"Oooooer! Please stop it, dear!" implored Bessie. "Ow-oooh!"

Dolly gave a final pull, and released Bessie's plait. The fat junior made a dive for Study No. 4, and vanished within.

"Cat!" grunted Bessie, as she dropped into a chair, and rubbed her head tenderly. "Little cat!"

Bessie had the study to herself. Barbara Redfern and Mabel Lynn were playing tennis, and Bessie should have been doing her prep. But the fat junior could not forget the waste of good food in the passage.

If Bessie Bunter was good at little else, she was certainly good at cooking. That was the fat junior's strongest point. And it went to Bessie's heart to see good food spoiled by bad cooking.

"She ought to put just a little dripping in that," she said to herself. "Just a pinch of salt, and—and a soup-cube. There's one in the cupboard."

Bessie paused reflectively.

"A soup-cube would do it beautifully," she continued. "Just give it a nice taste."

An idea came to Bessie.

She rose and crossed to the door. Then she looked out cautiously into the corridor.

A Magnificent, New, Long, Complete Tale of the Girls of Cliff House, introducing Bessie Bunter.

BY

HILDA RICHARDS.

The pot was still bubbling on the fire; but Dolly Jobling was not there.

Bessie returned quickly to the study, and took a handful of salt and her soup-cube. Then she darted out into the corridor, and approached the bubbling pot.

Dolly Jobling was still away from her cooking.

"Fancy leaving a thing to look after itself!" grunted Bessie. "Why, I can't smell anything at all—at least, nothing like a good stew! It's spoiling! It's got quite a fruity smell!"

Bessie glanced cautiously towards Study No. 7. She was still alone. Her hand opened, and the salt and soup-cube dropped into the bubbling pot.

Bessie had just caught up the spoon to stir the pot, when she heard a sound behind her. She spun round hastily, to observe the angry face of Dolly Jobling.

"Leave that alone!" snapped Dolly.

"I sha'n't tell you again!"

"Oh, really, Dolly—"

"Go away, Fatima!"

"But I'm just helping you—"

"Don't want help!"

"I just want to make it nice and—" Dolly advanced threateningly, and Bessie backed away hastily.

She made her escape from the Cosy Corner, and eyed her rival from a distance.

But Dolly was too busy just then to worry about Bessie.

She had her hand full, and, after looking at the bubbling mixture, she repeated Bessie's action and dropped something into it.

"Look out!" said Bessie warningly.

"What do you mean?"

"Dud-don't put too much in—you'll spoil it!"

"What do you know about it? You can't cook for toffee!"

"Who kik-kik-can't kik-kik-cook?" hooted Bessie, almost speechless with indignation.

Dolly smiled indulgently.

"You may think you're rather good at it," she said; "but there's only one thing I'd recommend you to cook!"

"What's that?" said Bessie curiously.

"Your head!" said Dolly, with a grin. "Boil it!"

"Cat!" growled Bessie.

Bessie ambled away dismally to Study No. 4.

The fat junior was deeply interested in the concoction boiling over the fire. Bessie would have liked to have taken charge of operations herself.

There was nothing in Study No. 4, and the fat junior was, if possible, more hungry than usual.

She picked up her books, and endeavoured to work out a sum. But Bessie was not in the mood for work.

She looked at the clock. It was ten to seven, and supper would be ready in a few minutes.

Bessie got up, and looked stealthily out of the door. She was just in time to see Dolly Jobling pick up the pot and carry it into the study.

Then she came out again, and went down the passage.

Bessie's eyes gleamed. A brilliant idea suddenly occurred to her.

She glanced up and down the passage to see that she was unobserved. Then she stole out, and entered Study No. 7.

The steaming pot was standing in the hearth unguarded.

Bessie did not pause. She snatched it up, and made off to her own study.

As she shut the door she heard footsteps. The door opened, and Barbara Redfern and Mabel Lynn came in.

"Hallo!" said Babs. "What are you doing, Bessie?"

Bessie beamed expansively.

"Just got a nice little hot supper for you girls," said Bessie.

Mabs looked at the steam rising from the hearth.

"Good!" she said. "What is it?"

"Stew!" said Bessie, smacking her lips.

"Stew! Where did you get the meat from?"

"I—er—I had it given me," said Bessie quickly. "It's very good meat, really."

"Well, we'd better have it while it's hot," said Mabs practically. "I must say it's very thoughtful of you, Bessie."

"I thought you'd like it," beamed the fat junior.

Three plates were produced, and the juniors sat down quickly. Bessie stirred the pot with a tablespoon.

"We'd better have soup first," she said. "There's a lot more gravy than meat here."

"H'm!" said Babs, sniffing.

Bessie proceeded to ladle the "soup" out.

It was a rather curious colour for soup, and it had a strange, mixed smell, which was quite new to the juniors.

"Quite sure the meat was all right?" asked Babs, eyeing her plate suspiciously.

"Of course," said Bessie indignantly. "It was lovely meat, with a beautiful red colour. Simply splendid. A pity, really, to make it into soup."

"Sure?"

"Yes. You go on. You'll find it grand!" said Bessie confidently.

Babs and Mabs tried a mouthful of their "soup."

"Oh!" said Mabs.

"Ugh!" said Babs.

"Prejudice!" snorted Bessie, sitting down herself. "You watch me!"

She took up her spoon and tasted the soup. The smile faded from her face, and Bessie looked positively horrified.

"Oh, dear!" murmured Bessie. "I—I—think the mum-mum-meat must have bub-bub-been off!"

No Joke!

"WH-WHAT a horrible mixture!" groaned Mabel Lynn.

"I don't believe it's meat at all!" declared Barbara Redfern.

"Let's have a look at it."

"It tastes more like fruit and meat

mixed up together," said Mabs, lifting the pot up on to the table.

Bessie blinked at her study companions.

"It's all Dolly Jobling's fault," she said dismally.

"Whose fault?"

"Dolly Jobling's. She knew there was something wrong when she gave it to me."

Babs dipped the spoon into the pot, and brought out two small, black objects. She examined them critically.

"They're prunes!" gasped Mabs.

Bessie leaned forward, and glared through her thick spectacles at the fruit.

"Pip-prunes!" she stammered. "Oh, dear!"

"What does it mean, Bessie?" asked Babs.

"Ask Dolly Jobling."

"Dunno," she said. "Ask me another."

"So it's all Dolly's fault," continued Bessie, keen on saving her own reputation. "You see, if I'd known it was prunes, I shouldn't have put some—that is, I shouldn't have thought it was stew, should I?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a tap on the door, and Marjorie Hazeldene and Clara Trevlyn, followed by Dolly Jobling, came into the study.

"Hallo!" said Clara. "Here's our missing supper!"

"My prunes!" said Dolly Jobling.

Barbara Redfern looked up in surprise.

"Didn't you send them in for our supper?" she asked.

"Yours!" laughed Clara sarcastically. "What's this? A new idea of a jape?"



Crash! Bessie Bunter hit the door, and it opened. A smother of white concealed the fat girl from view. "Ow! Yow! Groooooogh!" she roared.

"What's she got to do with it?"

"She—er—that is, she gave it to me for supper," said Bessie, glibly. "I ought to have known that there was something wrong."

"You told us you made it yourself."

"Th-th-that was a fuf-figure of speech," explained Bessie Bunter.

"Dolly Jobling cooked it all. You ask her."

"Wonder why she put meat in it," mused Babs. "Perhaps it's her idea of cooking."

"She told me it was stew," said Bessie. "I didn't know it was fruit."

"But that doesn't explain soup in it."

"I thought it was stew!" snapped Bessie.

"I know that," said Babs.

"Well, if she said it was stew, how was I to know that it was prunes?" asked Bessie defiantly.

Babs grinned. She could not see what the guilty mind of Bessie was driving at.

"Jape? No jape here!" said Mabel Lynn. "Bessie said that Dolly had given them to her."

"What?" snapped Dolly Jobling. "I never said anything of the sort. She hung round me all the time I was cooking them."

"Oh, really, Dolly—" commenced Bessie indignantly.

"And when I went down below, I suppose she must have taken them," finished Dolly. "Cheek!"

"I say, Barbara, you don't believe that I—I pinched them, do you?" protested Bessie.

Babs laughed.

"Sorry, Clara, if there's been a mistake," she said. "We certainly don't want 'em! Did you say that Dolly cooked them?"

"I did," said Dolly, smiling.

Babs and Mabs looked at each other, and burst out laughing.

"Bessie Bunter's got a redeeming feature, after all," said Babs. "She can cook!"

"We're quite satisfied, anyway," retorted Clara, replying to the thrust at Dolly's cooking. "Our cook doesn't—er—borrow other people's suppers."

And the chums of Study No. 7 left, with the precious pot of prunes with them.

Babs turned to Bessie Bunter.

"Fatima," she said, severely, "if you go helping yourself to someone else's supper again, you'll get ragged! See?"

"Oh, really, Barbara," said Bessie, blinking through her thick spectacles. "I really can't see how you can blame me. I got them for you, you know."

"Me?"

"Of course, I did," said Bessie. "I wasn't a bit hungry myself!"

"Mum-my word!" ejaculated Babs.

Mabs reached into the study cupboard, and produced a loaf of bread, and some butter.

"That's all there is for supper," she said, setting it on the table. "We'll have to have that."

Bessie gazed at the plain repast disdainfully.

"I wish I hadn't touched that—those prunes," she said. "If Dolly hadn't told me it was stew, I shouldn't have—have thought it was stew, should I?"

"What on earth are you talking about, Fatima?" demanded Babs. "That's the second time you've said that."

"Well, a good cook doesn't usually put a soup cube in prunes, does she?"

"Of course not. Why do you ask?"

"Well, you see, I thought it was stew," said Bessie. "But as it was fruit, I didn't touch it."

"You didn't touch it? What do you mean?" demanded Babs.

Bessie was about to reply, when the door opened violently, and the chums of Study No. 7 came in again.

"We don't want 'em," said Babs, cheerily. "Can't you tackle Dolly's cooking?"

Clara set the pot of prunes down on the study table with a bang.

"Jolly poor idea of a joke you girls have got!" she said severely.

"What do you mean?"

"It's bad enough to take anyone else's supper," said Clara rather angrily. "But it's not playing the game to go and mix a lot of salt and gravy stuff in and spoil it all."

"What do you mean? Do you think we did that?"

"Of course, you did."

"Wrong, my dear," said Barbara Redfern. "That's just why we didn't thank you for your present."

"Well, who did it, then?"

"Didn't Dolly cook the prunes for you?" asked Babs.

"Yes," said Clara; "but—"

"There you are!" said Babs, triumphantly. "You can't blame us for what she does, can you?"

Dolly Jobling went red. She had set fire to kippers, burnt rashers, and spoilt cakes in her time. But it was a libel to say that she put soup into stewed prunes.

"I can cook a jolly sight better than you!" she snapped.

"Very likely," said Babs. "But Bessie does our cooking."

Clara banged the pot on the study table again.

"Please be careful, dear," said Babs.

"You're not at home now, you know."

"Look here," said Clara, "Dolly said she'd cook some prunes for supper. She's often done them before, and done them jolly well. This time that fat image of yours commandeers them and brings them into your study. When we get them back, they're absolutely spoilt. See?"

"We tasted them," said Barbara. "I'll admit they're spoilt. But we didn't do it, dear."

"Then who did?"

"Must have been the cook," grinned Mabel Lynn.

"Oh, nonsense!" said Clara.

Dolly Jobling was a deeper crimson than ever, and looked as though she was on the verge of having a fit.

"Do you mean to insinuate that I should put soup in pip-prunes?" she demanded.

"Looks like it," said Babs. "Of course, I expect it's a mistake. I'm awfully sorry that the food's spoilt. But you can't blame us for it."

"But soup in prunes!" gasped Dolly. "Why on earth do you think I should do it?"

"Art for Art's sake, maybe," laughed Mabs. "I don't know much about cooking, but if you have apple sauce with pork, I don't see that some people shouldn't like soup with prunes."

Clara banged the pot on the table once more.

"I wish you two would be serious for a minute," she snapped. "We don't regard it as a joke. Dolly didn't put the soup in the pot. It didn't get in by itself. Therefore, it must have been put in in this study. Now, who did it?"

"I didn't," said Barbara Redfern.

"Neither did I," added Mabel Lynn.

Clara turned to Bessie.

"I say, Clara," said Bessie hastily, "I didn't do it, you know. I thought it was stew, so I shouldn't be the least likely to do a thing like that—I mean, I knew it wasn't stew. I never touched the pot at all. You know what Dolly's cooking is always like!"

"Look here, Bessie," said Dolly sulphurously, "I shall pull your hair if you say anything more about my cooking."

"Order, please!" said Babs, smiling.

"But what about our prunes?" demanded Marjorie Hazeldene.

"We'll get Bessie to cook the next lot for you," said Babs. "Then they'll be all right."

"Yes, I'm sure I don't mind," added Bessie, beaming.

"Declined without thanks," said Clara drily. "I believe that you're responsible for spoiling our supper as it is. Now, answer this, Bessie. Did you bring the prunes into this study to spoil them, or to scoff them?"

"Er—not to spoil them," said Bessie diplomatically.

"Well, I don't believe it," declared Marjorie, joining in. "I believe you only brought them in to mix the gravy stuff into them."

"She couldn't have done," said Babs quietly. "We passed Dolly Jobling as we were coming upstairs. And we heard the door shut behind Bessie, as she came into this study. She didn't have time to do anything."

"Oh, you would stick up for her!" snapped Clara. "You're only doing it because you want to say that Bessie's a better cook than Dolly."

"No need to, dear," said Babs. "It's too well known. Why, we knock spots off No. 7 everywhere. Didn't we beat you at tennis to-night? No. 4 always has been top study at everything, dear!"

"Top study, are you?" snapped Clara, snatching up the pot of ruined prunes. "We'll see about that!"

Crumbs!

BANG! The door of Study No. 4 was shut with unnecessary violence as the indignant juniors of Study No. 7 departed.

"Oh, dear!" said Barbara Redfern, looking across at Mabel Lynn with an expression of dismay. "Now we're in for it!"

"We am—we is!" agreed Mabs,

smiling. "They'll be trying to take a rise out of us. Poor Clara!"

"Clara has no sense of humour, I'm afraid," said Babs. "She really thinks that we did it to rag her. Fancy that—especially after she'd left the cooking to Dolly Jobling."

A wheezy cackle came from the arm chair.

"He, he, he!"

Babs looked up in surprise.

"What's the matter with you, Bessie?" she asked suspiciously.

"He, he, he!"

Mabel Lynn picked up a cushion and looked as though she was going to crown the mirthful fat junior with it.

"I—I say, steady on!" said Bessie suddenly.

"What's the matter with you?"

"Can you girls keep a secret?" said Bessie mysteriously.

"Yes—provided that it isn't anything criminal," said Babs cautiously.

"You won't tell those girls in No. 7?"

"Don't suppose so."

"Quite sure?" asked Bessie, still more mysteriously.

Babs sighed.

"Why don't you get on with it?" she said wearily.

"He, he, he!"

"Oh, do stop cackling like a hyena!"

"He, he, he!" giggled Bessie.

"Look here," said Mabs, "I shall throw this cushion if you don't stop that noise."

Bessie's cackling ceased.

"It's an awfully good joke," she said.

"I—he, he, he!—really oughtn't to tell you. But, seeing that it's all for the study that I did it—he, he, he!—I don't mind, if you promise to keep it a secret."

"What is it?"

"He, he, he!"

"Look here, Bessie," said Barbara Redfern slowly, "you'll go straight to the Zoo if you make that noise again!"

"It's such a good joke, though," said Bessie, beaming through her round spectacles. "I can't help laughing—he, he, he!"

"You'll help it in a minute!" said Mabs desperately.

"Well, I'm going to tell you this quite confidentially," said Bessie. "Who do you think spoilt the prunes?"

"Dolly Jobling," said Babs and Mabs together.

"You're wrong," said Bessie proudly. "I did. He, he, he!"

Babs and Mabs looked dumbfounded.

"Y-y-y-you dud-did!" gasped Babs at length.

"Yes," said Bessie, beaming. "The little cat wouldn't let me cook them, so I just did her a good turn, see? He, he, he!"

"You little duffer!" said Babs sulphurously.

"Oh, Barbara!" exclaimed Bessie, her smile suddenly fading. "I—I only did it for the sus-study, you know."

"And spoilt a good supper!"

"Only for the study!"

"You nasty little thing!"

"It—it was a splendid juj-joke," explained Bessie. "They really think it's Dolly Jobling, you know."

Babs looked desperately at Mabs.

"What shall we do with her?" she asked.

"Pull her hair!" said Mabel Lynn.

"And bump her!"

"Shake her!"

"And starve her!" added Barbara Redfern, with an inspiration.

Bessie Bunter got up hastily from her chair, and backed into a corner.

"It was all for the sus-study, you know," she muttered. "I didn't mind about the pip-prunes myself."

"You nasty little thing!"

"It's—it's a jolly good joke," said Bessie feebly. "They think that Dolly

Jobling did it, and you know she can't cook for nuts."

"They don't think anything of the sort," snapped Babs. "We've been defending you all the time, and now you say you did it. I'd like to make you eat the lot."

"I—I say, really, you know—"

"Why did you say that you hadn't touched them?" demanded Mabs.

"I—I didn't," said Bessie defiantly. "I said that I hadn't touched them in here. I put the soup, and the salt, into the pot while Dolly was cooking it. See?"

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

"I'm not," said Bessie. "You're wild because you didn't do it yourself. You haven't got the courage to— Yow! Leggo my hair!"

Bessie's remarks came to an abrupt termination. The chums of No. 4 had reached the end of their patience.

"Look out!" yelled Bessie in alarm. "You're hurting! Yow!"

"Bump her!" said Babs shortly.

Babs and Mabs were not very used to the art of bumping. In fact, they were mere amateurs. But Bessie had put her foot in it this time with a vengeance.

The two chums took firm hold on the fat junior.

Bessie struggled, but it was of little use, and suddenly she fell to the floor with a thud that shook the study.

"Yooooop! Yarooooogh!" roared the fat junior.

"Give her another!" said Mabel Lynn.

"Yow! Groooooogh! Lemme go!"

Bump!

"Ooooooh! I—I didn't do it intentionally, really, you girls!" said Bessie wildly. "Wow! Leggo my plait! I didn't mean to do it, you know!"

Bump!

"Yoooooop!"

Bessie sat in the corner and blinked miserably.

"Cats!" she said.

Barbara scratched her head.

How to deal with Bessie was a problem which was rather too much for her. Bessie, however, sought to improve the shining hour.

"I—I wish you girls wouldn't always think of yourselves, you know!" she protested. "I'm not like some of you, always thinking about myself. I knew how keen you were about taking a rise out of the others, so I did it for you. It didn't matter to me at all."

"But you said it was an accident!"

"Well, it was," she said. "I knew that the prunes were stew—I mean, I didn't think that the stew was prunes, so I put the prunes—I mean the soup—in the stew to improve it. And now they think it's Dolly. He, he, he!"

Babs picked up the cushion, and fondled it lovingly.

But Mabs had a better idea. She crossed to the table, and swept up a handful of breadcrumbs.

Bessie was still sitting in the corner, trying to be cheerful. She did not see Mabs cross. But she suddenly felt something prickly and uncomfortable slide down her neck.

"Oh!" said Bessie suddenly, clutching at her neck. "Cats!"

"Now bump her again!" said Babs.

But Bessie had had enough. She scrambled to her feet, and made a hasty bolt for the door.

Babs and Mabs did not try to stop her. They were very pleased to get rid of the fat junior at any time.

"Now, what's going to be done?" demanded Barbara Redfern, as the door closed. "We didn't tell a fib, but we backed that fat image up!"

"Better own up!" said Mabel Lynn.

"We can't do that!" said Babs. "Besides, we've got nothing to own up about. The prunes are spoilt, so it can't be undone. And if we give Bessie away, that's not playing the game!"

"She told us confidentially, didn't she?" asked Mabs, grinning.

Babs nodded.

"We're not afraid of No. 7!" she said, dropping into a chair. "They can go on ragging till further orders. Anyway, they wouldn't believe us when we said we didn't know anything about it!"

There was a bang on the door, and Bessie Bunter looked into the study. Bessie was wriggling, as though in great discomfort.

"I—I say, you girls—" she commenced.

"Go away!"

"But I— Cats!"

The door slammed hastily as Babs caught up the cushion.

OUR PORTRAIT GALLERY!



No. 8

MISS BULLIVANT.

"If Marjorie cares to be reasonable about it," said Babs, "we'll buy her some more prunes, and make Bessie cook 'em! We can say that we were mistaken, without giving Bessie away, and we can tell them that it was an accident."

"But if they want to ride the high horse, they can!" said Mabs. "We're top study, anyway!"

The door opened again, and Bessie Bunter peered cautiously in. Her face was red, as though with great exertion.

"Please can I come in and do my prep?" she said.

Barbara Redfern relented.

If Bessie's prep was not done, there would be trouble for her in the morning. And Babs and Mabs did not want to cause that.

"All right!" said Babs shortly.

Bessie came in, and sat down.

And for the rest of that evening there was no further trouble or disagreement in Study No. 4.

Bessie is Too Keen!

"BARBARA!" Babs turned round rather guiltily as she heard the sharp voice of Miss Bullivant.

"Ye-es, Miss Bullivant?" she said.

Morning lessons were just over, and the girls were making their way down to Hall for dinner.

"I want to speak to you for a moment, Barbara," said the Bull, in quite genial tones. "Have you ever heard of Miss Betteridge?"

"Yes, Miss Bullivant."

"What do you know about her?"

"I was here last time she paid a visit to the school," said Babs. "She usually comes about once a year, and takes tea in one of the studies."

"That is correct," said the drill-mistress. "Miss Betteridge was once a pupil at Cliff House, and she likes to revive the pleasant memories of her young days. She takes tea with the captain of the Fourth every year."

"The kik-captain of the Fourth?" gasped Babs.

"Yes. She has just written to Miss Primrose to say that she would very much like to follow her usual custom this year, and visit Cliff House next Friday. I understand that you hold the—er—exalted position I have just mentioned."

Babs blushed. Miss Bullivant had an unpleasant way of putting most things.

"I—I suppose I do, Miss Bullivant," she said.

"That being so," said the Bull, "you will have the pleasure of entertaining her to tea. Now, I want you to do your best to keep up the reputation of the Form."

"We shall do that, Miss Bullivant."

"You must have a clean tablecloth."

"Certainly."

"The room must be clean."

"Qu-quite so."

"There must be nice food," said Miss Bullivant, "and not those poisonous things that you sometimes make yourselves."

"Oh, Miss Bullivant!"

"The chairs must be straight."

"Yes."

"You must be polite and tidy yourselves," added the mistress.

"We—we shall be," murmured Babs.

"And," said the Bull, "you must wash your hands, and have your finger-nails clean—"

"Oh, Miss Bullivant!"

"I mean it!" said the Bull. "Nothing is more offensive to nice people taking meals than to see dirty finger-nails."

"Bub-bub-bub-but we—"

"That will do, Barbara!" said the drill-mistress. "I quite understand that you are ready to make a special effort for the occasion. If you wish for any advice in making the study artistic, I will help you."

"Th-thank you, Miss Bullivant!" said Babs.

Barbara walked away with a crimson face.

The Bull—as she was known to her affectionate pupils—could be exceedingly unpleasant at times.

"Clean cloth!" muttered Babs savagely. "Clean room, and—and kik-clean nails! Oh, dear!"

She hurried down to Hall, torn between two emotions.

It was a great honour for Study No. 4 to receive the lady familiarly known at Cliff House as "Aunt Betsy," but Babs was still smarting from the Bull's "advice."

Mabs had already started her dinner, and the place next to her was taken by Bessie, who, incidentally, had nearly finished hers, and was looking hungrily for a second helping.

Babs sat down, and ate her dinner moodily.

She joined Mabs, when they had finished, and went out into the quadrangle.

"What did the Bull want?" inquired Mabs sympathetically. "More lines?"

Babs shook her head.
"We've got to have a clean room!" she growled.

"Well, we have."

"And a clean cloth."

"What's the matter with ours? It's only had the jam upset on it twice!"
"And the chairs have got to be straight."

"How can you, with a great porpoise like Bessie swimming round all day?" demanded Mabs.

"Also, we've got to have clean fingernails!"

"Kik-kik-clean what?" gasped Mabel Lynn, aghast. "Mine are clean—cleaner than hers; anyway," she added, after inspecting them.

"What do you think of it?"

"Prussianism!" snapped Mabs. "We ought to strike!"

"Just as though we should trip Aunt Betsy up with the chairs, make her have her tea off the house-flannel, and scratch lumps out of her face with our nails!" concluded Babs, in great indignation.

Mabs regarded her chum thoughtfully.
"Have you got it badly?" she asked.

"Got what?"

"Brain fever. What on earth are you burbling about?"

"I think she meant to be rude."

"Jolly sure of it!" said Babs confidently. "The Bull always is. But if I'm not asking too much, what ever are you talking about Aunt Betsy for?"

Babs suddenly remembered that she had not acquainted her friend with the news.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you!" she said.

"Aunt Betsy—that is, Miss Betteridge—is coming to take tea with us next Friday."

"Really?"

Babs nodded.

"And the Bull's just been giving me some advice about how to receive her," said Babs. "She's going to make the study artistic."

"Mum-my word!" said Babs. "Can't we lock the door, or something, Babs? That would be too awful for words!"

Barbara laughed.

"I suppose the Bull means well," she said, relenting slightly. "But I wish she wouldn't be so officious. We can entertain Aunt Betsy all right without her help."

Mabs looked thoughtfully ahead.

"Aunt Betsy?" she said. "Oh, yes, I know her! She takes tea with the captain of the Fourth every year. We ought to have remembered that before. I say, that will be a fine shock for No. 7, won't it?"

Babs laughed.

"They'll be green with envy!" she agreed. "We'll have to make it a stunning success. That ought to be easy enough. And it will be no end of a score."

"What about Bessie Bunter?" asked Mabs.

Barbara Redfern's face fell.

"I'd forgotten Bessie," she said. "Hang it all, she'll spoil everything. Can't we get someone to look after her for the time being?"

"Afraid not," said Mabel, laughing.

"And it'll be no good trying to get rid of her by giving her a cake. She's certain to want to be in the limelight. Hallo, here she is!"

Bessie Bunter was coming across the quad with an expansive smile on her face.

"I've been looking for you everywhere," she said, beaming through her thick spectacles. "What do you think? Aunt Betsy's coming to have tea in my study next Wednesday!"

"Your study—eh?" said Babs. "I thought she was coming to mine!"

THE SCHOOL FRIEND.—No. 8.

Bessie blinked.

"Well, ours, if you like!" she said peevishly. "It's all the same. She's really coming to see me, I should say!"

"Then we'd better charge her admission, Mabs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bessie scowled.

"I can't see anything to cackle at!" she growled. "Anyway, the girls say she's a jolly good sort, and she's bound to give us something to pay for her tea."

"Look here, Bessie!" said Babs earnestly. "Aunt Betsy is not an easy old lady to get on with. It's only because we're forced that we're having her. I should advise you to keep out of the way while she's about. We'll promise not to say anything about you really belonging to the study."

Bessie blinked suspiciously.

"I'm not afraid of her," she said boldly.

"We'll give you a jolly good tea if you'll keep away!" said Babs desperately.

"No fear!" said Bessie. "I was just going to say that it would be best really if I told her I was the Form captain!"

"The—the what?"

"Form captain. She's bound to think more of us if she sees a nice, plump, well-built girl, instead of a scarecrow!"

"Oh dear!"

"Of course, I don't mind doing it at all," said Bessie. "I've entertained all sorts of titled people at Bunter Court."

"Er—this isn't Bunter Court, Bessie," said Babs. "Besides, Miss Betteridge isn't a titled lady. I don't think, to be quite candid, that she'll like you."

"Why?"

"She dislikes fat people."

"Who's a fat people—I mean, a fat person?" demanded Bessie indignantly.

"Well, you rather err on the avoirdupois side."

"I'm well built, if that's what you mean, and you're jealous of my figure!" snapped Bessie, who was not to be wheedled.

"Have it your own way!" said Barbara desperately. "But there's a splendid feed for you if you keep out of the way."

"There'll be a splendid feed in the study too," said Bessie, who was not slow-witted when it was a question of food.

"Two feeds! You can have as much as you can eat—" bargained Babs.

"Oh, really—"

"If you'll just leave us alone," finished Babs. "There's an offer for you. We don't want to be unsociable. We'd like you, as a matter of fact, to meet Miss Betteridge. But not in our study," she added, to herself to ease her conscience.

"It's only for your sake," added Babs. "If you don't mind, then meet her by all means."

"I think I'd better do my duty towards the study and be here," said Bessie. "I don't want to let you down."

And Bessie, having settled that point very magnanimously, walked away.

"There's nothing for it," said Barbara Redfern moodily. "She'll have to be here!"

"She'll make that awful noise when she's drinking tea!" protested Mabs bitterly.

"And cough and sniff!"

Barbara Redfern sighed.

"It's got to be endured," she said resignedly. "Oh dear!"

Terms From No. 7.

THE news of Aunt Betsy's intended visit spread like wildfire through the Fourth Form.

A good many of the studies would not have been at all pleased to receive a visit from the famous lady.

But those who were "out for glory," as Barbara Redfern expressed it, would have done anything to have the pleasure of entertaining her.

Bessie Bunter took the matter very seriously.

She tried to carry the air that Miss Betteridge was coming to Cliff House with the express purpose of visiting her alone.

Babs and Mabs were walking in the quadrangle after tea when Bessie joined them.

Bessie's eyes were shining behind her thick, round spectacles.

"Hallo, you girls!" she said cheerily.

Babs and Mabs did not seem to notice the remark. But the fat junior was not daunted.

"Decided what you're going to give her to eat?" she asked.

"No," said Babs crossly.

"I think some tarts would be very nice," said Bessie reflectively; "and some sardines, and some seed cake, and some chocolate, and peaches, and jelly, and—"

"Mum-my word!" ejaculated Mabel Lynn. "We don't want to choke Aunt Betsy."

"I should think that anyone with a healthy appetite would be grateful for a little snack like that," said Bessie Bunter.

"She'd probably think we were making fun of her, and make us eat it all."

"He, he, he!" giggled Bessie.

Bessie saw no very great threat in that. It would have suited her down to the ground.

Three figures came out of the School-house, and crossed the quad quickly.

They made straight for the chums of Study No. 4.

"Hallo!" said Mabs, looking up in surprise. "Marjorie wants us."

Marjorie, Clara, and Dolly Jobling, to judge by their looks, had something pretty weighty on their minds.

"Just a minute, Babs!" said Marjorie Hazeldene. "We want to—er—er—"

"Present an ultimatum," said Clara Trevlyn promptly.

"Hostilities," added Dolly magnanimously, "are temporarily suspended."

"Ahem!" said Babs.

"H'm!" said Mabs.

Bessie Bunter sniffed. She did not waste her energies on the idle arts of etiquette.

"It's about Aunt Betsy," said Marjorie, trying to look very calm.

"Oh, yes!" replied Babs. "She's coming to see us."

"You?" snapped Clara. "She's coming to see the Form captain."

"All the same thing. I'm captain of the Fourth."

"So you say," returned Clara. "But it's high time we had another vote. No. 7's top study, and always has been."

"Hadn't noticed it," smiled Mabel Lynn. "But I'm pleased to hear it. I'll come and have a look one day when you've cleaned it out!"

Marjorie coughed.

"Look here!" she said, beginning to colour. "There's no need to be sarcastic. We entertained Aunt Betsy last time she was here, and we ought to do it again."

"Why?"

"Because it's the proper thing."

"Sorry I'm so fearfully dense, really," said Babs; "but I can't really see how you arrive at that amazing conclusion."

"It's all nonsense about you being Form captain!" said Clara, taking up the cudgels again. "No. 4 Study's only an upstart! You'll go and disgrace the whole school!"

"Steady on, Clara!" said Marjorie. "We don't mean it like that, Babs. But you ought to leave it to us, under the circumstances. She'll really expect to see us."

"Don't see why she should," smiled Mabel Lynn. "If you were in the Fourth last year she'll call you a set of dunces for still being there."

"He, he, he!" cackled Bessie Bunter. "Look here!" said Clara. "It's no good beating about the bush. You can claim the right to do it, if you like. But it isn't the thing. And we're not going to back you up."

"Don't want you to!" snapped Bessie, who was beginning to take a very personal interest in the conversation.

taining. You must see that! So are you going to leave it to us?"

"No fear!" said Bessie defiantly, from behind Babs.

"Who spoke to you, Fatima?"

"I'm really the principal one in the study!" retorted Bessie warmly. "And you don't have my permission."

Barbara Redfern grinned. "We're with Bessie this time," she said. "Sorry, dear, to disappoint you. But Aunt Betsy's coming to see us."

"She's coming to Study No. 4!" seconded Bessie, shifting behind Mabs for greater security.

"You still think you're top study, then?" asked Clara Trevlyn.

"Most decidedly!"

to want us to do it just because you think you're top study is the limit."

"All right!" said Clara carelessly. "But mind, we've warned you!"

"Yah!" screamed Bessie, from a distance.

"We'll look out for trouble!" grinned Babs. "But you won't catch us napping."

"Go home!" shouted Bessie Bunter. Dolly Jobling frowned.

"You go and eat coke!"

"And you go and stew prunes! He, he, he! Prune stew! Stewed prunes and poison! He, he, he! You go—"

Bessie's further advice suddenly ceased, and that fat young lady turned and scampered wildly in the direction of



"Look out!" exclaimed Marjorie Hazeldene. "It's falling!" The cupboard swayed for a moment, and then lurched forward to the already damaged table.

"I wasn't talking to you, Fatima!" "Aunt Betsy's coming to see me!" retorted Bessie. "And you're not going to have her in your study!"

"Look here, Babs!" said Dolly Jobling. "It's only reasonable, you know, for us to want to have her. We know her tastes, and she'll think there's something wrong if she goes to Study No. 4."

"You can cook her some prunes, Dolly!" cackled Bessie. "He, he, he!" Babs frowned, and nudged Bessie. But Bessie did not heed nudges.

"Why not make her some prune stew?" suggested the fat junior. "Prune stew! He, he, he! Prune— Yow! Yarooooogh!"

Dolly Jobling had lost her temper, and she held Bessie's plait firmly in one hand. "Yow! Leggo!" roared Bessie. "Yooooop!"

"Stop it, Dolly!" said Babs quickly. "She insulted me!" snapped Dolly, releasing her hold. "Those prunes—"

"Blow the prunes!" interrupted Clara tersely. "Look here, Babs and Mabs; you ought to see our point! Study No. 7 is top study, and ought to do the enter-

"Make rings round you any time!" added Bessie.

"Well, then," said Clara, with a grim smile, "we shall have to convince you that you're not. Look out for gales—I mean, squalls!"

"And you look out for stewed prunes!" retorted Bessie. "He, he, he!"

"We don't want any remarks from you, Bessie!" snapped Dolly.

"And we don't want any stewed prunes from you, Dolly!" retorted Bessie. "He, he, he! We don't want— Yow! Stoppit!"

Bessie bolted hastily, and just evaded the avenging cook of Study No. 7. She returned to continue the argument at a safer distance.

"Well, have you decided, Babs?" asked Marjorie.

Babs smiled.

"Absolutely!" she said. "You seem to have a fearfully inflated opinion of Study No. 7. I don't see that you've got any claim at all. You've never been anything like top study."

"It's rather a check asking us to stand back at all," agreed Mabs. "But

the tennis-court, with Dolly Jobling in hot pursuit.

Marjorie and Clara walked away, evidently quite convinced at last that further argument would not avail.

Barbara Redfern looked at Mabs, and grinned.

"Poor old No. 7!" she sighed. "Ha, ha, ha!"

From the distance came a faint roar, followed by a dull thud.

"That's Bessie!" said Mabs. "I suppose Dolly's caught her. Well, while she's out of the way, let's go up and look at the study, and see what we can do to brighten it up."

"Good idea!" said Babs.

The two made their way up to Study No. 4 in the Fourth Form passage, and closed the door behind them.

Babs looked round critically.

"It doesn't look bad," she said thoughtfully. "Everything's clean and tidy. The only thing is that the wall-paper's a bit faded."

Mabel Lynn nodded.

"It's going to be done up next vaca-

tion," she said. "Pity it wasn't done last vac!"

Babs eyes lit up.

"Idea!" she said, touching her forehead dramatically.

"Never!"

"Think we could paper it ourselves?" she asked excitedly.

"Us?"

Mabel Lynn's eyes lit up as she thought of it.

"Don't see why we shouldn't," she said quickly. "I've watched the men at home, and there isn't much in it. But where could we get the paper?"

Babs laughed.

"I've thought of that," she said. "Piper's got rolls of it in one of the sheds. I dare say he's willing to sell it. Let's go and see him!"

"Rather!"

Babs and Mabs raced off to find Piper. That worthy gentleman was asleep; but after expressing surprise, and asking many questions, willingly agreed to part with the paper for a few pieces of silver.

Babs and Mabs bore their prize back in high glee to the study.

"Now, the first thing we want is paste," said Babs. "I'll make that up to-night, and we'll start work to-morrow night. There's a good ladder and heaps of brushes in the box-room. We can just borrow them when we want them."

"No need to hurry it," said Mabel Lynn. "We've got almost a week. So we'll just do one wall at a time."

"Do the whole job at once," said Barbara Redfern in a superior manner. "I don't believe in making two bites at an apple. Well, I'm going to make the paste. That'll be enough for to-night."

The amateur decorators grinned cordially. The scheme, to them, seemed an excellent one.

Bessie's Booby-Trap!

"MIND, it's a dead secret!" warned Barbara Redfern.

Bessie nodded her head.

"You wouldn't expect me to go and tell anything about you going to paper the room, would you?" she demanded.

"Hush! Not so loud!" said Babs. "It's up to the study to be as smart as possible, and we want you to help. See? But it must be kept secret. We're going to start to-night."

"I—I'll hold the ladder," volunteered Bessie generously.

Babs and Mabs had kept their plan to themselves for almost twenty-four hours. But it had become evident that Bessie must be told, as she would be bound to talk about it unless specially sworn to secrecy.

"You'll have to make yourself useful as well," said Babs. "It's going to be a big job."

"I'm all right at anything like that," said Bessie confidently. "You leave it to me!"

"Well, we're starting after supper," said Mabel Lynn. "I've got the paper all cut off in the proper lengths, and Babs has made the paste. So don't forget to come up promptly."

"All right!"

"We're going down to tennis now. Remember—it's a secret!"

"Of course it's a secret!" she growled. "Just as though I should give one away. I hate those nasty little cats in Study No. 7!"

Bessie took her favourite position in the rocking-chair, and ruminated on the position.

Prep during the summer months was, as a rule, fairly light.

Study No. 4 had finished, mainly

owing to Babs' energy in keeping her chums up to it.

There was nothing for Bessie to do but think at the moment.

A glance in the cupboard showed her that it was empty.

Bessie was just thinking whether it was worth her while to try and raid somebody else's cupboard when Marjorie Hazeldene looked into the study.

"Babs here?" she asked.

"No!" snapped Bessie.

"Oh!" said Marjorie. "Thanks!"

Bessie scowled as she closed the door. Her eyes moved round the study. It had just occurred to her that she might possibly be able to take a rise out of Study No. 7 off her own bat.

The thought pleased Bessie immensely.

Bessie was not given to deep and ponderous thinking very often.

But owing to the personal affronts she had suffered, she was taking the present rivalry between the two studies very much to heart.

Bessie continued to think.

Her eye settled on a cardboard box standing on the table.

It contained flour, which Bessie had brought into the study to make tarts with.

But as she had previously eaten the jam, it was no use at present.

It suddenly struck Bessie that it would make a very good booby-trap.

After ten minutes' hard thought Bessie concluded that the flour might be used very usefully for that purpose.

Having come to that conclusion, she proceeded to put the plan into execution.

But there she met her first difficulty.

It was easy enough to fix the box in position from inside. But Bessie wanted to be outside, so that she could watch the fun.

It was quite ten minutes before Bessie, standing on a chair just outside the door, contrived to balance the box on the top.

A considerable quantity had been spilt on the carpet, but Bessie did not worry about that.

She stepped down at last, with a smile of contentment on her face.

"That will do it fine!" she said.

Bessie looked at the chair she had been standing on, and scratched her head.

She was on the verge of picking the chair up and walking into the study with it. But, fortunately, she remembered her own trap in time.

"Never mind!" she muttered. "I'll wait for them!"

So Bessie sat down on the chair, and proceeded to wait for her victims, looking for all the world like a fat spider waiting for the flies to walk into her parlour.

Ten minutes passed, and Bessie began to tire of the inaction.

She was just about to rise when she heard footsteps along the corridor, and she saw Clara approaching.

Clara stopped, and looked at Bessie thoughtfully.

"Hallo!" she said. "What on earth are you doing here?"

Bessie smiled amiably. She did not realise how funny she looked.

"Just—er—sitting down, Clara!" she said.

"Well, why don't you go inside?"

"Er—I'd rather sit here, thanks!" said Bessie offhandedly. "By the way, Babs wants you!"

"I've just seen her."

"She—she wants you again."

"Where?"

"Just in the study here," said Bessie.

"But I left her on the tennis-court about five minutes ago!"

"Er—I mean, Mabs wants you," said Bessie hastily.

"I left her down there, too!" said Clara, looking at Bessie curiously.

"Y-y-yes, I forgot that! I mean, they've left a note for you on the table inside. That's what I meant to say."

"Don't want it!" said Clara shortly.

"It's a very important note," said Bessie earnestly.

"Don't mind!"

"There's two for you."

"I shouldn't worry if there were two hundred, Fatima!"

Bessie paused in confusion. But it was only for a moment.

"I say, Clara, do go in and get that note! I promised to give it to you."

"Well, go in and get it yourself."

"I—I, that is, I've hurt my foot!" explained Bessie. "I can't walk! You get it yourself."

"Look here," said Clara, "what do you want me to go into the study for?"

"N-n-nothing, except to see Babs—I mean, to get the note!"

"Have you fixed anything up over the door?"

"Oh, really, Clara," protested Bessie, "you are a suspicious girl! Just as though I should put a box of flour on the door!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blest if I can see anything to cackle at!" growled Bessie. "I just asked you to go inside. I shouldn't think of fixing up a booby-trap for you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Clara Trevlyn laughed, and walked on. Bessie was too much of an amateur at japing to be taken seriously at all.

Bessie blinked as Clara walked calmly past the web. She could not understand why Clara had been so suspicious.

"Nasty little cats!" she growled.

"They think that everyone's like themselves!"

Bessie continued her watch for prey. But the prey did not walk along.

Bessie tired of waiting at last.

After her fruitless endeavour to get Clara to enter the study, she did not expect to find any further excuses to lead that shrewd young lady into her trap.

But Marjorie and Dolly Jobling still remained.

Bessie made her way down to the quadrangle, and there she found them. She approached Marjorie with a fat smile on her face.

"Hallo, Marjorie!" she said. "I've been looking for you."

"Really? What do you want?"

Marjorie's greeting was distinctly cold. But Bessie was quite undaunted.

"Will you come up to my study for a moment, dear?" she said.

"No," said Marjorie.

"But I've got something awfully special to show you."

"What is it?" demanded Marjorie suspiciously.

Bessie thought hastily.

The note had not worked with Clara, and probably would not work with Marjorie.

The only thing that Bessie could imagine to be sufficiently alluring was the scheme about the wallpaper.

Bessie had been told Barbara and Mabel's scheme as a secret. But she had a much better idea on foot herself.

She considered it quite worth while to give away the other wheeze so that she could work this one.

And Bessie was burning to tell someone.

"They're going to paper the study?" she whispered excitedly.

"Surely not?"

Marjorie was really interested.

"It's a fact," said Bessie. "You come up, and I'll show you the paper."

Marjorie hesitated.

"Why are you telling me this?" she demanded.

"I expect it's another scheme," said Dolly Jobling suspiciously.

"No, it isn't, you little cat!" said Bessie spitefully. "I've—I've fallen out with Babs. So now you'll be able to take your revenge."

"Oh!" said Marjorie dubiously.

She hardly liked to take advantage of a traitor in the camp. But something had to be done, all the same.

Bessie was busy squaring her conscience about sneaking.

She was trying to convince herself that Marjorie would be so upset about the flour that she would forget about the idea of papering the study.

"It's quite all right," said Bessie. "You come up now, and—and you can pinch the paper, if you like!"

"Be careful what you do, Marjorie," said Dolly.

"You can go and stew prunes!" snapped Bessie. "You go—I mean, don't be so suspicious," she added hastily. "It's quite all right, Marjorie. I shouldn't fix up a trap for you. I'm not that sort of girl!"

"All right. I'll come," said Marjorie.

She did not give Bessie any idea that she had given the game away. But Marjorie had suddenly seen the wheeze, and she saw a way out.

She was going into the study, but not first.

Bessie led the way quickly. She was brimming over with excitement.

Marjorie was going like a lamb to the slaughter, or so the fat girl thought.

In the Fourth Form passage they met Clara Trevlyn. Clara grinned and winked. Marjorie nodded back, but kept the same straight face.

"What's the matter, Bessie?" asked Clara.

"You mind your own business!" snapped Bessie. "I'm going to show Marjorie something."

Bessie paused at the door of Study No. 4, and stepped aside. But she was not quite quick enough.

A pair of hands caught her and propelled her towards the door.

"Look out!" roared Bessie. "Stop it! I— Yooop!"

Crash!
Bessie hit the door, and it opened. A smother of white concealed Bessie from view.

"Ow! Yow! Groooooogh!" roared Bessie Bunter.

Wrecked!

"HA, ha, ha!"
Marjorie and Clara roared with laughter.

"Yooooop! Yow! Wow!"
Bessie stood and floundered in the doorway like a fat ghost.

She was white from head to foot, and flour was dropping off her on to the carpet every time she moved.

"Splendid!" said Clara Trevlyn. "Now you're in, you might pass me out those notes from Babs, Bessie."

"And show me the wallpaper," added Marjorie Hazeldene.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Groooooogh!" muttered Bessie. "Oh dear! I'm blinded! I'm suffocating! I'm— Atishooooo!"

And Bessie sneezed violently.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bessie's efforts to score off No. 7 had failed lamentably. But her rivals had not finished yet.

As a matter of fact, they had only just begun.

"Clara," said Marjorie, "I believe they've got some wallpaper in there."

"No, we haven't!" growled Bessie, rubbing her eyes. "We—b-r-r-r-r!—haven't got any—atishoooo!"

"They were going to paper the study," said Marjorie. "Let's get a roll, and paper Bessie!"

"No, you don't!" roared Bessie, still rubbing her eyes, and trying to replace her floury spectacles on a still flourier nose. "No, you don't, you little—atishoooo!"

Marjorie dodged into the study, and looked under the table. She came back triumphantly with a large roll of wallpaper in her hand.

"Quick!" she said. "Roll her up in it!"

Study No. 7's luck was in, for just at that moment Dolly Jobling appeared in the passage, and, seeing that something was happening, hurried along.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Atishoooo!" retorted Bessie.

"What are you doing, Bessie?" asked Dolly. "Making pastries?"

"I'm—atishoooo!"

"We're going to paper her, Dolly," said Clara. "Help."

But Bessie was in no condition for a great resistance.

She was laid down on the passage floor without doing any more damage than transferring some of her surplus flour to Dolly and Clara.

"Stop it, you cats!" she howled. "I—I say, dud-don't wrap me up in that paper, dud-dears!"

"Sha'n't hurt, Bessie."

"Pup-please dud-don't!" roared Bessie in louder tones. "Oh dear! Oh, you little cats! Oh, you kik-ca—I mean, kik-kind girls. Please don't! Oh dear!"

But the chums of Study No. 7 were relentless.

The paper was wound round Bessie's feet, and then she was rolled in it, until her arms were pinioned to her sides, and only her head and feet stuck out from what looked like a mass of roses.

And still Marjorie and Clara kept her rolling.

"There's another forty feet of paper," said Dolly, gazing on with an approving eye. "Don't waste it."

"Ha, ha! No!"

Bessie was rolled in the paper until the last of it had wrapped round her.

Then she lay and blinked in helpless fury at her captors.

"Now, put her in the study," said Marjorie. "I'll write a label for her."

Bessie was rolled into the study, and sat just on the floury carpet inside the door.

Marjorie Hazeldene returned with a luggage-label in her hand.

"Let's tie this round her neck," she said. "Quick! There's someone coming!"

"Cats!" snapped Bessie, glaring at her captors in a manner which threatened to crack her thick spectacles.

Marjorie stepped back, and surveyed the luggage-label with approval. On it was written:

"A Present from Study No. 7."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Cave!"

Marjorie & Co. beat a hasty retreat, and gained their own study just as Babs and Mabs came along the passage.

Babs was carrying a bucket, which was evidently heavy.

"We ought to be able to make a start, and get a lot done to-night," Babs remarked. "Bessie will be in the way, but she may help a bit. I— Hallo! Mum—my word!"

"Oh dear!" gasped Mabs.

The two juniors paused outside Study No. 4, astounded.

Bessie, on account of the floral design wrapped round her, looked something like a gigantic rose-bush in full bloom.

"Wh-wh-wh-wh— Oh dear!" said Babs. "What on earth have you been doing, Bessie?"

Bessie scowled.

"It's those nasty little cats in No. 7," she said. "They—they've been ragging me, Babs!"

"It—it looks like it," said Mabs gloomily.

Bessie blinked in annoyance.

"Well, aren't you going to pull this horrible paper off me?" she growled.

"How did it happen?" demanded Babs.

"It was all Marjorie's fault!" snapped Bessie.

"But you're white all over!" exclaimed Mabs. "And the carpet's all covered!"

"Marjorie did that!"

"How?"

"She pushed me into the room!"

"Well, where did the flour come from?"

"I—I just pip-put it over the dud-dud-door!" exclaimed Bessie. "Then the little cats pushed me in first!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Babs.

Mabel Bynn joined in the laugh. The two juniors could not help it.

It was a score against the study, but it was just the sort of thing that Bessie Bunter would be bound to do.

"Blest if I can see anything to cackle about!" howled Bessie, swaying about on the carpet as though she was a rose-bush in a gale.

Babs noticed the label round her neck. She stooped and read it, and suddenly stopped laughing.

"Look at this, Mabs!" she snapped. "Sold again! Oh, Bessie, you silly little donkey!"

"Silly little donkey!" howled Bessie indignantly. "Well, I like that! Here I've been fighting your battles all the evening, and then you turn round on me. I don't call that gratitude!"

"Why don't you leave our battles alone, if you can't do better than this?" snapped Barbara. "You've ruined the carpet, and spoilt a roll of wall-paper. We sha'n't be able to paper the place. I've a good mind to pour this paste over you, and stick you like that for good!"

"Sus-sus-stick me like this for gug-gug-good!" gasped Bessie. "Pup-please undo me!"

Babs and Mabs caught hold of the wall-paper and tore it off Bessie.

It was too dirty and creased to go on a respectable wall.

Bessie rose at length, still looking more like a fat white ghost than a girl in the Fourth Form at Cliff House.

She stood and blinked.

"Go and shake yourself in the open air!" said Barbara Redfern. "You're a nuisance, Bessie!"

"Cat!" growled Bessie, as she rolled away down the passage, leaving a white trail behind her.

Babs and Mabs exchanged a hopeless look.

"She—she's wrecked everything!" muttered Barbara. "We can't do the papering, and we shall be very lucky if we get the carpet clean by the time Aunt Betsy arrives!"

Mabel Lynn nodded.

"No good standing and looking at it, though," she said. "We'd better straighten things up!"

The two juniors started putting the study to rights.

After they had supper they continued the work, and it was not until bed-time that they managed to get the carpet to look at all respectable.

THE SCHOOL FRIEND.—No. 8.



There was a titter from the class as Bessie Bunter's efforts to rise gracefully had ended in her falling over backwards. "Oh, my back!" she exclaimed.

Mabs brushed until her arm ached, and then Babs relieved her.

But it was a hard job.

Bessie Bunter very wisely kept away from the study.

She suspected that Barbara and Mabel would have made her help in the "straightening up" process, and she was not far out in her suspicions.

Marjorie, Clara, and Dolly Jobling came along presently, and smiled genially.

"Hallo!" said Marjorie. "Just getting ready for the royal visit—eh?"

"A clean carpet goes a long way!" agreed Dolly, smiling.

"Much healthier, too!" laughed Clara. Babs frowned.

"It may seem very funny to you," she snapped, "but there's not much fun in ragging that fat imbecile of ours, and messing up the study. Flour's above a joke!"

"That was Bessie's joke!" said Marjorie. "She stuck it over the door, and wanted me to walk in first. By a slight accident, she was in front of me! She was bringing me up to see the wall-paper!"

"To see the what?" gasped Mabel Lynn.

"Wall-paper!" said Marjorie. "Aren't you papering the study?"

"Oh, the hopeless little blabber!" groaned Babs, realising that Bessie Bunter had given the secret away. "No, we're not! Haven't got enough paper left!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Study No. 7, highly pleased with themselves, left.

They did not forget to mention the matter next day.

Bessie's unhappy little scheme was attributed to Babs and Mabs, and Bessie received sympathy on all sides.

THE SCHOOL FRIEND.—No. 8.

For the time being, No. 7 could chortle in comfort. They had scored, and scored with a vengeance.

Bessie did not escape punishment entirely.

She spent a solid couple of hours brushing the carpet the following night, and was only allowed to stop when she assured her study companions that her back was broken in three different places.

But, beyond keeping a watchful eye on Study No. 7, Babs and Mabs could do nothing.

The study would have to be smart enough as it was.

If any further scheme of decoration was decided on, No. 7 would be sure to step in and take a hand.

The week passed quickly, and the day of Aunt Betsy's arrival dawned. Babs and Mabs went down to dinner quickly.

They had permission from Miss Bullivant to go to the station to meet their guest.

They did not observe that Marjorie and Clara were late in coming down, and that, when they did, they were looking very red and excited.

As soon as they had finished dinner, Barbara and Mabel hurried off to the study to get their hats. They had just time to catch the train.

Babs opened the door, and then stopped suddenly.

"Oh, dear!" she murmured.

Mabs gave a gasp of dismay.

Instead of the neat little study they had left half an hour before, they beheld an absolute ruin.

The table and chairs were upside down, the carpet rolled back, and the pictures piled about anywhere.

Nothing was broken, or even damaged.

But it was not the sort of place that Aunt Betsy would expect to take her tea in!

Bessie Does a Little Furnishing!

"THIS," said Mabel Lynn, at last, "is Study No. 7's latest!" Barbara Redfern nodded. "They've made a pretty fine mess of it!" she said shortly.

The study looked worse than a lumber-room.

Nothing had been left in its place except the cupboard, which was too heavy for the girls to move.

But everything else was in disorder—even to the curtains, which had been taken down from the window, and festooned round the rocking-chair.

"We can't bring Aunt Betsy here!" said Mabs.

"Then we can't go to meet her!" replied Babs. "It will take us half an hour to straighten things up!"

"She'll be offended if we don't meet her," said Mabs. "And then she'll go and have tea in No. 7!"

"Oh dear! We can't let her go there. Supposing one of us stops behind?"

"No good! The Bull's written to say that we're both going. So we both ought to go! We'll have to get out of this some way!"

"But who'll do it?"

"Bessie will have to!"

There was a loud sniff at the end of the corridor, and Babs and Mabs turned to behold Bessie Bunter coming along.

"Bessie dear!" said Barbara Redfern, with unusual affection.

"Just a minute, darling!" added Mabel Lynn, equally affectionately.

Bessie Bunter came along suspiciously, and peered into the study.

"That's a fine mess you've made," she said. "What are you doing? Spring cleaning?"

"No, dear!"

"Well, fancy wrecking the study when you're expecting my visitor here!"

"Ahem! This is Study No. 7's work, darling!"

Bessie surveyed the ruins philosophically.

"Go and pull their hair—from me!" she suggested.

"As a matter of fact, Bessie," said Babs in her smoothest voice, "we haven't got time. We ought to be on the way to the station now."

"And we want you, as a special favour, to straighten up the study while we're gone," added Mabs. "Now, be a dear!"

Bessie blinked.

"I don't mind going to the station to meet Aunt Betsy," she said magnanimously. "One of you can stop and tidy up!"

"Ahem! Aunt Betsy has been told that we're going, you see, Bessie, so it wouldn't do!"

"Rubbish!" snapped Bessie. "She'll be pleased to see me there!"

"Well, it's like this," said Barbara diplomatically. "She's been told that you'll be in the study to receive her on her arrival. So you couldn't go to the station. Besides, there are all those tarts that Miss Plummy's baking for us this afternoon—they'll want attention."

"Oh!" said Bessie, somewhat mollified. "Still, it's jolly hard work, you know!"

"Not very hard, dear!"

"And hard work always makes me feel faint."

Babs coughed.

"We'll stand you a stunning feed, dear, if you'll straighten up," she said. "Tarts and chocolate, and sardines and peaches, and all sorts of things!"

"Any meringues?"

"Heaps of 'em!"

"And cream buns?"

"Dozens, dear! As many as you can eat!"

Bessie smiled.

"It's a bargain," she said.
 "Good old Bessie!" said Mabs enthusiastically. "I always said she was a brick!"
 "Make it nice and smart, won't you, dear?" said Babs, reaching for her hat.
 "Rather!" said Bessie. "Don't forget the cream-buns, though!"
 Babs and Mabs raced down the passage. They were already late, and could not afford to waste any more time.
 They were just turning the corner when they heard Bessie's voice.
 "I say, you girls—"
 "Hallo?" said Mabel desperately.
 "I want some ices, too!"
 "All right!" said Mabs. "You shall have them."
 With the prospect of a good feed, Bessie set about her arduous task. But, having replaced the carpet and one or two chairs, she felt sleepy.
 She sat down in the rocking-chair to rest.
 The next thing Bessie knew was that the bell for afternoon school was ringing.
 "Oh dear!" murmured Bessie.
 She made her way gloomily to Hall. She had failed to carry out the contract. And Bessie knew that there would be no feed unless she did so.
 Miss Bullivant was waiting for the drill class. Bessie took her place at the end of the line and groaned.
 Bessie was always at the end of the line, on account of her inability to do anything correctly.
 "Number!" said the drill mistress.
 Bessie stood and looked hopelessly ahead while the girls numbered.
 "One! Two! Three—"
 "Ooooooh!" sighed Bessie.
 "Bessie Bunter!" snapped Miss Bullivant. "You did not number!"
 "Twenty-five!" said Bessie dreamily.
 "Ooooooh!"
 "Stand out here!" snapped the Bull.
 "Ooooooh! Please, I do feel bad, Miss Bullivant!" said Bessie, in a quaking voice. "Ooooooh!"
 "Drill will cure that!" snapped the drill mistress. "Take up your usual positions for drill."
 The girls scattered over the Hall into "open order."
 Bessie took up her usual position mechanically.
 "Tension!" snapped the Bull.
 "Ooooh!" groaned Bessie, moving very slowly.
 "Arms upward—bend!"
 "Ooooooh!"
 "Arms upward—stretch!"
 "Ooooooh!"
 The Bull glared.
 "Bessie Bunter!" she snapped. "What is the matter with you?"
 "I do feel bad, Miss B-B-Bullivant!" said Bessie dismally. "Ooooooh!"
 "If you make that noise again, Bessie, you will do extra drill! Now, then, arms downward—bend! Downward stretch!"
 "Oh dear!" sighed Bessie.
 "Bessie, did you make that noise again?"
 "N-no, Miss Bullivant. I said, 'Oh dear!'"
 "I wish for no remarks! Now, then, arms upward—bend! Arms sideways—stretch!"
 "Oh, oh, oh, oh!" ejaculated Bessie.
 "Oooooo-er! Oh, oh, oh!"
 From the noise Bessie made it sounded as though the exercise was literally tearing her in pieces.
 "What is the matter with you, Bessie?"
 "Please, miss, my arms hurt me—something fearful!"
 "Then you may rest a minute."
 Bessie proceeded to rest. But the next order included her again.
 "You can do this, Bessie," said the

Bull. "On the toes—raise! Knees—bend!"
 "Ooooooh! Oh, oh, oh! Oooooo! Yarooooogh!"
 "Rise!" commanded Miss Bullivant.
 "Yow! Yooooop!"
 There was a titter from the class. Bessie's efforts to rise gracefully had ended in her falling over backwards.
 "Oh, my back!" howled Bessie. "Oh, don't touch my back! Ooooooh!"
 Miss Bullivant hurried across and helped Bessie to her feet. Bessie blinked dismally and straightened her glasses.
 "I—I think it's g-g-g-gout, miss!" she said.
 "Nonsense!"
 "Ski-attica!"
 "Do not talk foolishly!"
 "I mean rheumatism," said Bessie quickly. "My uncle died of rheumatism. My brother at Greyfriars died of it—I mean, he's going to die of it!"
 "I do not believe there is anything the matter with you!" snapped the drill mistress.
 "Shame!" said a voice from the front.
 "Who said that?" demanded the Bull angrily.
 "Shame!" said another voice.
 Miss Bullivant turned round. But as fast as she moved a voice came from somewhere else.
 The drill mistress flushed crimson.
 "I will not have this—this insolence!" she rapped. "Unless the girl who said that steps out—"
 "Nonsense, Miss Bullivant! It's cruelty to children!"
 Miss Bullivant spun round as though she had been shot, expecting to find Miss Primrose at her elbow.
 It had been her voice. But there was no one visible now.
 Apparently the headmistress had just spoken through the open door.
 "I will excuse Bessie Bunter this after-

noon, Miss Primrose," said the Bull hastily. "Bessie, you may go and lie down."
 "Thank you, miss!" said Bessie.
 Bessie moved surprisingly quickly for one afflicted with such an attack of rheumatism.
 A grin twitched about the corners of her mouth.
 Her strange gift of ventriloquism had come in very handy.
 Once out of Hall, Bessie sped up to Study No. 4 and resumed her interrupted task of straightening up.
 In ten minutes she had made the study look quite presentable.
 But Bessie was not satisfied. She wanted to make a profound impression on Aunt Betsy.
 Bessie nipped into Study No. 7. There were two rather nice chairs in there.
 She picked them up and carried them into Study No. 4.
 Pleased with the effect, Bessie looked into Study No. 5. Her eyes glittered with pleasure.
 "Nice table there!" she said. "We want another. It'll just hold the food."
 And Bessie continued with her work until she heard the bell go for "change lessons."
 Bessie had been excused from drill, but not from French. So she abandoned her task sorrowfully, and went down below.
 Mabs and Babs joined her as she went in.
 "We've brought aunty up," said Barbara. "She's a funny little old lady—no bigger than any of us. Seems rather snappy, too."
 "Where is she now?" inquired Bessie.
 "With Miss Primrose," said Babs. "We're going to fetch her in to tea as soon as lessons are over, so you'd better nip down then and get the teapot. The matron's going to fill it, and make toast. How's the study looking?"



"Wh—wh—wh— Oh, dear!" said Babs. "What on earth have you been doing, Bessie?" Bessie Bunter scowled. "Those girls in Study No. 7 have been ragging me!" she faltered.

"A perfect treat!" said Bessie, beaming. "You will like it. You'll hardly know it!"

And in that Bessie was quite correct.

Not Exactly a Success.

"THIS way, Miss Betteridge." "Ah, yes!" said Aunt Betsy, following quickly on the heels of Babs and Mabs. "I remember this passage well. Nice little studies. Plain, but homely. Just enough furniture for what is necessary. It is a delightful idea!"

"Exactly, Miss Betteridge. This is ours," said Barbara Redfern, catching hold of the door-handle.

She opened the door. Miss Betteridge started to enter, and then paused.

Babs and Mabs looked inside to see what was the matter, and nearly collapsed.

Bessie was standing inside, with an engaging smile on her fat face.

But that was not what caused the consternation, although she was the author of everything.

Three tables stood in the room, and behind them were packed all the chairs that Bessie had been able to find.

Three curtains hung at each side of the window, and there were five clocks on the mantelpiece, varying an hour in their time.

The walls were simply covered with pictures.

"Is—is this your study?" gasped Miss Betteridge.

"Y-y-y-yes, miss."

"What an extraordinary place!"

Bessie advanced with an engaging smile.

"Pleased to meet you, auntie!" she said genially.

"What did you call me?" gasped the astonished old lady.

"Mum-Mum-Miss Bub-Betteridge," said Bessie. "Pip-pleased to see you looking so well. You can get in here quite easily if you climb over those two chairs."

Babs flushed.

Mabs looked as though she would have liked the floor to open and swallow her up.

"Climb over the chairs?" gasped Aunt Betsy. "What—what an outrageous thing to expect! Are you entertaining the school here?"

"Nun-no, miss," said Bessie hastily. "Only I'm rather rich, so—so I like to have plenty of furniture, you see. You girls might take those chairs away from the door, and give them to someone. Freda Foote would like them, I think!"

Babs and Mabs hastily rescued Freda Foote's two chairs and returned them to her study.

They returned to Study No. 4 to find Aunt Betsy sitting down, gazing round her in open-eyed astonishment.

"Silly little duffer!" gasped Barbara. "She'll ruin everything!"

"She must have burgled every study she could!" snapped Mabs. "Wh-what-ever can we do?"

Bessie was pouring out the tea, and ignoring Miss Betteridge.

The fat junior's labours during the afternoon had left her very hungry.

She did not want to wait.

"Can I help you off with your things, Miss Betteridge?" asked Barbara, in her nicest tones.

"Thank you," said Aunt Betsy.

She took off her heavy veil, her bonnet, and her cape, and proved then to be very much younger looking than the juniors had imagined.

"That is better," said Aunt Betsy, adjusting a pair of gold pince-nez.

THE SCHOOL FRIEND.—No. 8.

"But what do you want all this furniture for? It seems absurd to me."

"Juj-juj-just a fad," said Babs hastily. "You won't notice it when you get used to it."

"It's mine, really, Miss Betteridge," said Bessie proudly. "I have it because I'm so rich, you see, and—What are you kicking me for, Babs?"

"I don't like people who flaunt their wealth," said Miss Betteridge sharply. "I hate the idle rich. 'Poor, but honest' is my motto."

"That's mine, too, Aun—Miss Betteridge," said Bessie quickly. "I—I made a mistake just now. I'm not really rich, you know. All this furniture belongs to Barbara here, and—and Mabel," concluded Bessie, finally deciding to be fair and share the blame.

"Oh, are they idle rich?" inquired Aunt Betsy.

"Fearfully," said Bessie. "I'm very poor myself, but very honest. Honesty is the best policy, you know. Many an honest man has been driven to drink—I mean driven to his home by a wealthy man, you know."

Miss Betteridge blinked. She could not quite follow Bessie's conversation.

Babs was a bright red with indignation.

Mabs was considering whether it would be advisable to stun Bessie with a loaf of bread before she had time to say any more.

"Shall we have tea, Miss Betteridge?" she said.

"Y-yes, I think we will," said Aunt Betsy doubtfully.

Bessie caught up the dish of sardines, and started transferring them quickly to a plate.

"Two will be enough for me, please," said Aunt Betsy.

"Oh, I'm helping myself now," said Bessie calmly. "I'll leave two in the dish."

And that was all Bessie did leave.

Barbara, with the best grace she could muster, put the remaining two on a plate and passed them across the table.

"What do you think of the roses?" inquired Bessie, with her mouth full of bread-and-butter and sardine. "Ow! I wish you wouldn't kick me, Babs!"

Babs administered a harder kick on Bessie's shin, and caused that greedy young lady nearly to choke.

While Bessie was recovering, Babs managed to get a voice in the conversation.

"You must excuse Bessie starting, Miss Betteridge," she said politely. "But she has had a very busy afternoon. Er—it's a beautiful day, isn't it?"

Miss Betteridge frowned, and did not reply.

"Charming weather altogether," said Mabs, in her silkiest tones.

"Yes!" snapped Miss Betteridge.

"Oh, dear!" grunted Bessie, stretching her neck and drinking noisily. "I nearly choked. It was all through this little ca—girl kicking my leg. She's doing it again!"

"You appear to be very clumsy with your legs, Barbara," said Aunt Betsy sternly. "Have you St. Vitus dance?"

"Nunno! I—I—that is, I'm rather clumsy sometimes, miss," stammered Babs in dismay.

There was a knock at the door. Freda Foote's voice was heard.

"Anyone seen our clock in here?"

She looked in the door.

"There it is, you— Oh, I'm sorry! I—I didn't know you had a visitor."

The door started to close, but Aunt Betsy was not satisfied.

"Stop!" she commanded. "Is that your clock?"

"Ye—No, not that one," said Freda, putting a red face round the door. "It—it used to be mine, but I gave it to Barbara. I'm sorry. I forgot for the moment, miss."

"Very careless of you to forget," said Aunt Betty sharply.

The door closed on an unhappy Freda.

"These girls have a mania for clocks, you know," said Bessie. "I only own one thing in this study. That's my parrot up there. Very knowing bird, the parrot."

"Pretty old lady!" shrieked the parrot. "Give Polly sugar, pretty old lady!"

"Pretty what?" gasped Miss Betteridge, eyeing the bird sternly. "Old, did it say?"

"Pretty young lady!" screamed the parrot, correcting itself rather hastily.

"I'm not a young lady!" snapped Miss Betteridge. "I hate these parrots!"

"Pretty middle-aged—"

Babs kicked Bessie's foot, and the parrot's noise ceased abruptly.

"What an extraordinary bird!" said Aunt Betsy. "How old is it?"

"About five hundred years," said Bessie vaguely.

"Nonsense!"

"It is really," said Bessie. "It talks about Julius Cæsar, Romeo and St. Julien, and—and all sorts of things."

Aunt Betsy did not pursue the subject further, which was lucky for Bessie's historical knowledge.

The sound of voices floated in from the corridor.

"Anyone seen my table?" demanded Marcia Loftus.

"No. I've lost mine."

"And my clock's gone."

"So have my chairs!"

Aunt Betsy pricked up her ears.

"I hope that all this furniture in here does not belong to other girls," she said.

"I—that is—er—we—you see—"

stammered Barbara, going a deeper red.

"It seems that it does," said Aunt Betsy. "I think it would be wise if you returned it. It is very crowded in here."

"Yes, it is," agreed Bessie. "I told you you'd get found out, you girls! Yow! You kicked me again, Barbara!"

"We really didn't want all this furniture in here, Miss Betteridge," said Babs candidly. "As a matter of fact, we didn't arrange the study ourselves. It was a surprise to us to find it here."

"Oh, you fibber!" said Bessie.

"What?"

"Didn't you tell me to get all I could?" demanded Bessie.

Aunt Betsy waved her hand irritably.

"Please put these other girls' goods outside as soon as you can," she said.

"I do not wish to hear an argument as to who is to blame. You are spoiling my tea."

Babs and Mabs got up, and proceeded to put some of the surplus furniture in the corridor.

Bessie grinned and continued eating.

"Then you are not idle rich?" inquired Miss Betteridge, as Babs and Mabs sat down.

"No, Miss Betteridge," said Barbara Redfern.

"Bessie Bunter said you were," said Aunt Betsy. "Why did you not correct her?"

"Pretty poll, pretty poll!" screamed the parrot suddenly.

Bessie did not wish for explanations to come just then.

Miss Betteridge was not eating as heartily as she might have done.

As a matter of fact, the tea was an

absolute frost. Only Bessie was enjoying herself.

"Poor but honest is a very good motto, Miss Betteridge," said Bessie suddenly. "It has always been my motto. Of course, it's difficult sometimes, I know. Perhaps you get hard up sometimes, Miss Betteridge. I do. What are you making faces at me for, Mabel?"

"I do not get hard up, as you term it," said the old lady, with dignity.

"Lucky to be like that," said Bessie. "As a matter of fact, I'm expecting a postal-order for five pounds—I mean, five postal-orders for one pound. I—I always pay back you know."

"What do you mean, girl?"

"I—I was just wondering if you might care to—lend me a pound until it comes, miss. Yow! Leave me alone, Mabel! You're kicking me now! If it wouldn't be troubling you, miss—"

Miss Betteridge rose.

"I have had enough of this," she said. "I am going to see Miss Bullivant, and then I shall take my departure."

Quite a Success.

THE door closed sharply. Bessie Bunter blinked at her two companions.

"Now you've done it!" she snapped. "Left nearly all the conversation and entertaining to me, and then you go and drive my guest away. Jolly ungrateful, I call it, after the way I—"

"Bump her!" roared Barbara and Mabel in one breath.

"Oh! Here, I say! Stop it, you cats!" gasped Bessie, rising hastily.

"I—Yarooogh!"

Bessie bumped heavily on the floor. "You little fathead!" cried Babs.

"You've spoilt everything yourself! You—you—"

Bump! "Yarooogh!"

Bessie saw that, if she stayed, she was in for a busy time.

She scrambled to her feet, and made a wild bolt for the door.

The fat junior scampered down the passage as though an army was after her.

Babs dropped into a chair, and wiped her brow with a handkerchief.

"Wh-what a dreadful sell!" she muttered.

"An absolute frost!" agreed Mabs. "Won't No. 7 chuckle about this?"

Barbara got up.

"Look here, Mabs, I'm desperate!" she exclaimed. "We're not going to be ragged by them! I've got an idea. We'll take a rise out of them. Quick! Where's that black apron?"

"In the cupboard. Why?"

"Pass it out, there's a dear!"

Mabel Lynn passed the apron out.

Babs tied it round herself, so that it almost touched the ground.

Then, picking up Aunt Betsy's bonnet, cape, and veil, she proceeded to don them.

"What's the jape?" asked Mabs, interestedly.

"Study No. 7!" said Babs. "They're not going to escape Aunt Betsy entirely. They wanted to see her. They're going to now!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Where's that card they tied on Bessie, the other day?"

"Here," said Mabs, opening a drawer. Babs made a deft alteration on it with a pen, and then went to the door.

"I'll be as quick as I can," she said. "Good-bye!"

The pseudo-Aunt Betsy swept along the corridor and tapped at Study No. 7.

"Come in," said a voice. "Aunt Betsy" entered. Marjorie Hazeldene rose hastily, and endeavoured to drop a curtsy. Clara Trevlyn rose and smiled.

Dolly Jobling jumped up quickly and knocked the bread and butter on the floor.

"Good-afternoon, Miss Betteridge," said Marjorie. "We are very pleased to see you looking so well."

"How can you see I'm looking well?" growled Barbara Redfern.

"Er—we hope you're keeping fit," said Clara.

"Keeping who?" demanded Babs, still more tartly.

"In g-gug-good health," said Clara, lamely.

"What business is that of yours?" demanded Babs suspiciously. "And who is that careless girl over there, throwing bread and butter about the floor?"

"That is Dolly Jobling."

"Wobbling?"

"No, Dolly Jobling, Miss Betteridge."

"H'm! So she ought to be," said the "old lady" enigmatically.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Betteridge," said Marjorie hastily.

"Don't beg my pardon!" snapped "Aunt Betsy." "This is not the nice

Aunt Betsy. "I shall not object. Gracious! Haven't you any chairs in here?"

"There's only one here nun-now!" explained Clara. "We usually have three, but we've lent two."

"So that I should have to stand up, eh?"

"Nunno! Not at all, Miss Betteridge. You take this one. We—we like sus-standing up, after we've been sitting all day."

"Most unmannerly," said Babs, sitting down, with a sigh.

"Will you take off your veil, miss?"

"No—no, thanks," said Babs, quickly. She leant forward and picked up a small, rather black-looking thing from a plate.

"Good gracious! What's this?"

"Th—that's a cake," said Marjorie. "Very good, really. They're home-made. Dolly Jobling makes those."

"H'm!" grunted "Aunt Betsy." "I should call it a brick myself. It's waste of good flour. Is there no one to stop this sort of thing?"

"Mum—Miss Bub-Betteridge!" gasped Dolly, colouring furiously.

"And that other flat-looking thing, too," said Babs, picking up a round cake, and dropping it back on the plate with a dull thud. "I suppose you'll tell me that that's a cake!"

"Y-y-y-yes, miss. That's a home-made cake, too."

"Well, it spoils a cake to sit on it, you know."

"Sus-sit on it?" gasped Dolly Jobling. "Nun-nō one has been sitting on it. That's the natural shape."

"Dear me, dear me!" sighed the disguised Babs. "What extraordinarily good digestions you girls must have. I could have been sure that someone had been sitting on that—that thing!"

Dolly Jobling blinked in dismay.

She had a wild desire either to cry, or to attack Aunt Betsy with the slandered cake.

"Aunt Betsy" rose from the table.

"I really could not eat anything with those awful things about," she said. "In my young days, I should have been caned for such wilful waste!"

"Oh, dear!"

Barbara looked round the study, and suddenly stopped quite still.

The unfortunate occupants of No. 7 heard her sniff.

"There's a funny smell here," pronounced Aunt Betsy.

"Fuf-funny smell?"

"Yes; a musty smell. I expect that it's one of the pictures gone mouldy. Let me have a look at the back of that big one."

"Sus-certainly, miss," said Marjorie, hastily. "There's nothing musty in here."

"It smells like it, anyway."

Marjorie and Clara grasped the big picture, and commenced to lower it.

Dolly Jobling leant forward to give a hand.

The next thing Dolly knew was someone bumping into her, and at the same moment "Aunt Betsy" gave a wild howl of pain.

"Oh, my foot!" she screamed.

Dolly Jobling bumped into Clara.

"Look out!" snapped Clara. "You— Oh!"

Crash! Tinkle-tinkle! Crash!

Marjorie stepped back, with a gasp of horror.

The masterpiece of No. 7 lay on the floor, with its glass shattered in a thousand pieces.

"Clumsy girls!" snapped the pseudo-Aunt Betsy. "You've hurt my foot! And look what a mess you've made with

Next Thursday's Issue of

THE SCHOOL FRIEND

WILL CONTAIN

"Bessie Bunter's Way!"

A Magnificent, Long, Complete Tale of the Girls of Cliff House,

AND

A Splendid Long Instalment of "The Girl Crusoes!"



little study I saw a year ago, when I was here last!"

"Oh!"

"It's so dirty and untidy! It's in a disgraceful mess. Look at the dust on the pictures!"

"Oh, dear!"

The chums of Study No. 7 looked at the pictures anxiously.

Aunt Betsy seemed to have changed very much for the worse since their last meeting.

"Aunt Betsy's" keen eyes roved round the study.

Marjorie & Co. could just see them twinkling through the thick veil.

But they seemed to have a presentiment of disapproval.

"I hope you have some tea ready for me," snapped the "old lady." "I am very hungry, and I could get nothing to eat in Study No. 4."

"We—we shall be very pleased if you will have a little tea, Miss Betteridge," said Marjorie Hazeldene, quickly. "Of course, it's only a plain tea. We were not expecting visitors."

"As long as it is wholesome," said

the picture. Do you always carry on like this?"

"Nunno! We—that is—"
Sniff! Sniff!

"It isn't that picture that smells!" declared Aunt Betsy. "It is a most unhealthy smell. Perhaps it is the table. You had better turn it over and have a look."

"Oh, dear!" groaned Marjorie.

"Did you say 'no fear?'" demanded Babs, in a terrible voice.

"No, no, Miss Betteridge. Certainly we'll have a look."

Marjorie seized the table, forgetting a little weakness of which Babs was well aware.

Wheeze! Whe-e-e-e-eze!

Crash!

The leg of the table had been waiting repair for a long time, and it stood the strain no longer.

It fell away with a crash, and the table pitched into the corner.

Miss Betteridge blinked in affected surprise.

"Dear me!" she exclaimed. "I hope that you are not going to all this trouble to amuse me!"

"Er—no, not at all!" stammered Marjorie.

"And I can still smell that peculiar odour!" interrupted "Aunt Betsy." "Perhaps it comes from the cupboard. You had better move that out, so that I can look behind. I would not like to think of you girls catching fever."

Clara Trevlyn looked rather mutinous. She was getting very tired of this interfering old busybody.

But Marjorie Hazeldene caught her eye, and nodded.

"Must humour the old girl!" she whispered. "She's often like this! She'll make up for it in the end!"

The cupboard proved to be a bigger job than the others.

It took Marjorie, Clara, and Dolly five minutes of strenuous work before they even moved it.

"Aunt Betsy" tried to peer behind.

"Ah!" she exclaimed. "I see something that looks like a decaying cake! Move it a little further!"

Clara gave a furious pull.

"Look out!" shrilled Marjorie. "It's falling! Quick!"

The cupboard swayed for a moment, and Clara sprang back just in time. Then it lurched forward towards the already damaged table.

Bang! Crash!

A cloud of dust arose. The cupboard was lying on its face on the wreck of the table.

Under it lay the remains of the masterpiece of Study No. 7.

Clara surveyed the ruins of the study angrily.

Marjorie and Dolly, on the other side, were almost speechless with indignation.

"Now, where's the mouldy cake?" demanded Clara, turning round. "Now, where—"

She broke off short.

"Aunt Betsy" had disappeared into thin air.

"Wh-where's she gone?" gasped Clara.

"Out of the door!" said Marjorie. "She walked out in disgust!"

"Dis-disgust!" raved Clara. "Oh, my word! What's this?"

She picked up a luggage label lying just by the door.

On it was written the simple legend: "A present from Study No. 4!"

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Marjorie Hazeldene. "S-s-surely that wasn't Barbara Redfern in disguise!"

"It must have been!" gasped Clara Trevlyn. "It—it—"

"My word! We've been done—absolutely done!"

"So we have!" sighed Dolly Jobling.

The Wrong "Aunt Betsy."

BARBARA REDFERN quitted Study No. 7 in rather a hurry.

She had not quite finished her ragging there, as a matter of fact. There was further humiliation which the Form captain had planned for its unlucky inhabitants.

But just before the cupboard was overturned Babs heard a voice in the corridor which she knew very well.

Aunt Betsy had returned.

Babs dared not stay any longer. Aunt Betsy would doubtless be looking for her bonnet, cape, and veil.

While the unlucky trio were surveying the wreck of their study, Babs was hastily pulling off her disguise.

She entered No. 4 with a rather red face.

Barbara at the moment would have given half of what she possessed to have had her laugh at the misfortunes of her rivals.

In No. 7 she had not dared to laugh. And now she had no time.

Aunt Betsy was sitting in the rocking-chair. She looked at Barbara severely.

"So you have my clothes!" she said. "What are you doing with them?"

"I just bringing them in, Miss Betteridge," said Babs lamely. "It's no good waiting downstairs with them, is it?" she said diplomatically.

Aunt Betsy gave Babs a severer look than ever.

Barbara waited for the next question. But, quite unexpectedly, the wonderful thing happened.

Aunt Betsy leant back in her chair and laughed heartily.

Babs grinned faintly.

Miss Betteridge did not look half such a hateful person now as she had done.

"Put them on the table, Barbara," said Miss Betteridge, recovering herself somewhat. "I was at school once myself, and I did the same thing!"

"Sus-same thing?" gasped Babs. "What same thing, Miss Betteridge?"

"Wore someone else's clothes!" said Aunt Betsy calmly. "Where have you been?"

Babs grinned.

"Study No. 7, Miss Betteridge!"

"Oh! Who lives there?"

"Marjorie Hazeldene, Miss Betteridge."

"Really? I had tea with her on my last visit. So I suppose you are rivals?"

"We—well, something like that!"

Miss Betteridge laughed again, and took up her bonnet and cape.

Barbara Redfern helped her to put them on, feeling rather sorry that the visit was coming to an end.

"Must you really go so soon, Miss Betteridge?" asked Mabel Lynn.

Aunt Betsy looked at the collection of clocks on the mantelpiece.

"Well, not for a few minutes. I'll stay if you will promise to tell me the real facts about this afternoon."

"Oh!" said Babs and Mabs together.

Miss Betteridge seated herself in a chair with her back to the door, and laughed.

"You see," she said, "I have been having a talk with Miss Bullivant. She told me a few things, and I can see that my—er—somewhat hostile reception was the fault of that fat girl."

"Bessie Bunter?"

"Yes; I dislike her intensely. I wonder you do not move her out of the study."

"Er—we can't Miss Betteridge!" said Mabs candidly.

"I thought that might be the reason: I've been thinking things over, and it looks as though you left Bessie to arrange the study."

"We—we did," said Barbara.

"Then you could not be blamed for borrowing other people's furniture," said Miss Betteridge. "And, as Bessie seems to me to be untruthful, I suppose that there was no truth in what she told me about you being idle rich?"

"Not at all, Miss Betteridge!" laughed Babs.

"Then that explains everything. It really strikes me now as most amusing. I— Ha, ha, ha! Upon my word, I begin to feel quite young myself! By the way, where is Bessie?"

"Tr—I think Bessie has gone out!" said Mabel Lynn.

"Well, I should have done the same thing to her myself if I had been in your place!" laughed Aunt Betsy. "I suppose you made it too lively for her! You'd better tell me all about it!"

Babs grinned.

Aunt Betsy had come "out of her shell" with a vengeance.

Babs and Mabs felt quite at home now, and it was not telling tales out of school to recount their misfortunes.

So, leaving out little parts here and there which needed suppression, Barbara Redfern told the whole story.

Aunt Betsy lay back in her chair, and laughed until the chair fairly rocked.

"I would like to see some of this wallpaper of yours, Barbara!" said Aunt Betsy, thinking of that part of the story. "Was it very pretty?"

"We've still got some left, Miss Betteridge!" said Babs. "I'll get it!"

Babs dived under the table in search of the wallpaper.

At the same moment the door opened cautiously, and a red, angry face peeped into the room.

"There she is!" whispered Clara Trevlyn.

"Who?" asked Marjorie Hazeldene in the same tones.

"Babs!" said Clara. "She's still wearing the old girl's things, and she's sitting just inside, with her back to us! Mabs is grinning like a—like a Cheshire cat!"

"Oh, Clara!" murmured Marjorie. Clara clenched her fist.

Clara was really angry.

She had spent a fruitless quarter of an hour trying to straighten Study No. 7 up again.

And then she had had to call in the assistance of Piper, the porter.

And the object of all their troubles—Barbara Redfern—was apparently sitting just inside the door, laughing about it.

Clara had no doubt now, from the note she had found, that it was Babs who had ragged the study.

Further, she had no doubt at all in her mind that it was Babs she saw sitting just inside the study.

"Ready?" hissed Clara. "We'll make a rush for it!"

"Yes!"

"Come on, then!" barked Clara.

The door of Study No. 4 flew open, and the three indignant juniors surged into the room.

"Bump her!" snapped Clara.

Aunt Betsy started round in surprise, just as a strong pair of hands lifted her out of the chair and dropped her heavily on the floor.

"Oh dear!" gasped Aunt Betsy.

"We'll teach you to rag our study!" rapped Clara. "We'll teach you to smash up the furniture!"

Bump!

"Good—good gracious, child!" gasped

Aunt Betsy, looking up in amazement from her lowly position. "Well, I never!"

"All right, Babs!" laughed Clara. "We know you— Oh!"

Clara stopped all of a sudden, and felt herself go hot and cold by turns.

She had just caught sight of Barbara looking out from under the table.

"I—oh, you— I—I—" gasped Clara, turning pale.

Mabel Lynn dashed forward and assisted Miss Betteridge to rise.

"It's—it's a mum-mistake, Miss Betteridge!" explained Marjorie very penitently. "We—we thought that it wasn't you, you see! We're awfully sorry!"

"I—I dud-didn't really mean—" explained Clara breathlessly.

Miss Betteridge supported herself on the arm of the chair, and trembled slightly.

"Unparalleled!" she snapped. "I—I've not been bumped for—for forty years!"

"Oh dear!" gasped Clara. "I—I'm sorry—I mean, I'm glad—that is, I'm glad that you haven't been bumped for fuf-forty years!"

"Is this your usual way of treating guests?" demanded Aunt Betsy.

"Yes—I mean, no! Of course not, Miss

Betteridge!" said Marjorie. "We—we made a foolish mistake, of course!"

"I think it is scandalous!" snapped Aunt Betsy, in her most dignified tones.

"I shall say nothing more of this, but I wish you to take this for a lesson!"

"Th-thank you, miss!"

"We—we shall remember, Miss Betteridge! Thank you very much!" murmured Clara.

The discomfited occupants of No. 7 beat a hasty retreat. Aunt Betsy watched the door close, and then sat down in her chair quietly.

"I hope you are not hurt, Miss Betteridge!" said Barbara Redfern sympathetically. "I—I don't think that they meant to do anything! They—er—made a mistake."

"They did!" said Aunt Betsy grimly. "I wish, Barbara, that you would not wear my things about the school! Is anyone else likely to spring on me?"

"Nunno; not at all!" said Barbara blushing. "It—it was quite my fault this time, really!"

Aunt Betsy smiled.

"Well, you didn't know what they were going to do," she said; "and, fortunately, they haven't hurt me. I'm really feeling quite young again! Fancy being bumped! Ha, ha, ha! I haven't

been bumped for forty years! Oh dear! Ha, ha, ha!"

And Aunt Betsy's laughter was so infectious that Babs and Mabs had to join in.

But in Study No. 7 there were three glum faces. Marjorie Hazeldene & Co. had made a bold attempt to get even with their rivals, but had failed. And they were forced to admit that Barbara and Mabel had scored, and that, for the time being, at any rate, Study No. 4 was top study.

Aunt Betsy left in a very happy frame of mind about an hour later, and wrote to Babs and Mabs to tell them that she had not sustained any serious harm from her bumping, and was only a little stiff.

Incidentally, she described it as the most enjoyable visit she had paid to Cliff House.

And the large hamper which followed a couple of days later, and which Bessie Bunter pronounced to be "topping," showed that Babs and Mabs had not altogether put their foot in it during the visit from Aunt Betsy!

THE END.

(Another long, complete story of the Girls of Cliff House, entitled "Bessie Bunter's Way!" in No. 9 of "The School Friend," on sale Thursday next. Order your copy in advance to avoid disappointment.)



Your Editor's Corner.



Write to me as often as you like, and let me know what you think of "The School Friend." All readers who write to me, and enclose a stamped envelope, may be sure of receiving a prompt reply by post. All letters should be addressed: "The Editor, 'The School Friend,' The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

My Dear Readers,—I have received any number of letters from readers, in which they all have a special word to say for Bessie Bunter. Bessie is certainly not good looking, her manners are not of the best, and neither is she strictly honourable; but she is very amusing, and I can see that you all like her on that score. This being the case, you are all bound to thoroughly enjoy next Thursday's long, complete story of the girls of Cliff House, which will be entitled:

"BESSIE BUNTER'S WAY!"

By Hilda Richards.

Bessie is in trouble once again; in fact, she hardly ever seems to be out of it, does she? She is badly treated by a certain girl in the Fourth, and is then asked to keep a secret. But Bessie cannot keep a secret, as you have already discovered. She talks a little too much, and Barbara Redfern punishes her by refusing to allow her to accompany the chums on a picnic. But Bessie refuses to be left out, and you will be sure to enjoy reading how she plays a trick on Barbara Redfern & Co.; how she spends a very happy few minutes, how she receives a severe shock, and of the unfortunate predicament she finds herself in afterwards. As I have already said, Bessie finds trouble in this story, and there is a lot more trouble awaiting her after the picnic. Marjorie Hazeldene & Co. play very prominent parts in this story; Miss Bullivant is very much to the fore, and so is Marcia Loftus. Altogether, I consider this story one of the very best that has so far appeared. I wonder whether you will agree with me.

Of course, our next issue will contain another splendid long instalment of our grand adventure serial,

"THE GIRL CRUSOES!"

By Hilda Storm.

On page 17 of this week's issue you will see a picture describing an exciting incident which appears in next Thursday's instalment. I do not think I need say more to prove to you that you will thoroughly revel in the instalment.

What is Your Opinion?

"Dear Editor,—My brother has often told me that there is nothing he enjoys more than to read a good series of barring-out stories. He says the stories are very exciting when the boys shut themselves in an outbuilding and refuse to obey orders and go into lessons. Now, why cannot we have a barring-out at Cliff House? I am sure the stories would prove popular, and I know I should enjoy them very much. I do hope you will be able to do as I suggest.

"Yours sincerely,
"A. F. G."

The above is a letter I have received from a Birmingham reader, and it has set me thinking. A barring-out at Cliff House! Well, there is no doubt that the subject would make a fine series of stories; in fact, it might run for three, four, or even five weeks. I want to hear from all those readers who would like such a series, and I also want to hear from those readers who would not like it. Then I shall count up the votes, and if the majority of you are in favour of a barring-out series, then it shall appear immediately. And if the vote is a favourable one I can promise you that the stories will be full of fun and excitement—that they will be stories that will hold you from start to finish.

I Am Waiting to Hear From You.

Once again I wish to repeat my request for letters. My post-bag is still a very heavy one, but, of course, I am anxious for it to reach larger proportions. I have spent some very happy hours just lately in reading letters from readers, and in replying to them. Some readers, in fact, have taken to writing to me regularly, and I assure you that nothing could please me more. Have YOU written yet? If not, sit down at once and write me a few lines, telling me exactly what you think of the SCHOOL FRIEND. If there is anything you do not like about our new paper do not hesitate to mention it, and if there is any information of which you are in need let me know, and I will do all I can to supply you with it.

Replies in Brief.

F. E. H. G.—I was extremely pleased to receive your letter, and to learn that your sons and daughter are such strong supporters of the SCHOOL FRIEND. I trust they will remain so for a long time to come.

"A Sheffield Admirer."—Very glad to hear that you think both our stories are champion. Thousands of other girls, like you, have longed for a paper on the lines of the SCHOOL FRIEND.

Ethel Evans (Edinburgh).—Many thanks for your nice letter. I quite agree with you that Bessie Bunter is very amusing. You are correct in your surmise concerning the fat girl of the Fourth. I hope you will send your full name and address next time you write. Then I can send you a reply through the post.