

Our Splendid New Serial! "NO JOY IN HER RICHES!"

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The School Friend

Every **2**¢ Thursday



NOT TO BE FRIGHTENED!
(A thrilling incident from the magnificent new long complete story of the Girls of Cliff House School, contained in this issue.)

cmDadcha

For and Against "THE CROCODILE CRAWL."—See Page 282.



The "CROCODILE CRAWL"

An Article of Interest to All Schoolgirls.

AGAINST!

HILDA, Theda, and May dashed into my study with more haste than dignity.

"I hate girls dashing into my study at any time, but just now I had a wretched headache. I was intensely annoyed."

"Buck up!" said Hilda. "You'll be late-if you don't get a move on. They're forming up now outside in the quad."

"Yes, do hurry, Phyllis!" added May. "We're playing those Private School Prigs this afternoon, and I wouldn't miss seeing them licked for anything!"

Now, secretly, I was just dying to go and watch the match. The Private School Prigs, as we called them, had challenged us to a game of cricket, and we, the High School Highbrows, as the Prigs were pleased to call us, had gladly accepted the challenge, knowing as we did that a triumphant victory for us was a foregone conclusion.

"As I have said, I wanted to see the match, but there was a fly in the jam-jar."

"No," I said firmly, "I'm not going! I can't go! My head is simply splitting. The pain is excruciating!"

I placed my hand to my head and groaned.

"Poor old Phil!" said Theda. "So sorry, dear! We'll come and see you after the match, and tell you all about it. So-long!"

I heard them speeding along the corridor and down the stone steps to the quadrangle.

I heaved a sigh of relief.

I can tell you at once that my headache was a fiction. I was as right as rain; and I did want to see the match. But as I gazed down into the quad and saw Mary Robins, the house prefect, forming up the girls into two ranks, tallest on the right, shortest on the left, and shouting out commands like a C.O. on church parade, I was glad that I remained snug in my room on the fictitious plea of a headache.

Perhaps it wasn't quite playing the game to pretend I was off colour. Still, I simply had to escape the wretched "crocodile crawl."

I presume you know what the crocodile crawl is? If you don't you're very lucky, for, to my mind, it is the worst invention ever devised for the humiliation of the school-girl.

For it is humiliating to be marched along the streets, two by two, like a gang of convicts in a prison. It spells disaster to a girl's dignity and prestige, and renders her an object of ridicule to other girls who are allowed to walk about unfettered, and free, like ordinary human beings.

Our school is the finest, bar none, in the world, but why we have to be marched about in an undignified procession is beyond my comprehension.

The crocodile crawl has always been a nightmare to me. I remember how awful I felt the first time I went to church. Our way led us right through the town, along the High Street, and just as we were breasting the hill that led up to the church, a gang of Private School Prigs popped their heads over the wall and called out nasty names.

"Yah! Look at the crocodile crawlers!" they yelled.

Although I was only one of fifty, I felt that their rude remarks were addressed to me personally. I suppose we all imagined the same, but the other girls didn't seem to mind. They were hardened to it, I suppose, but, being a new girl, I felt dreadfully humiliated.

To make my position even more intolerable, I had to walk at the end of the procession, at the tail-end of the crocodile.

Ever since I have hated the crocodile, and have endeavoured to dodge it whenever possible. I often sacrifice an afternoon's walk rather than walk along with the other girls.

I don't care to miss the church service, as the vicar's sermon is often very interesting, but I don't care a fig for the afternoon walk, for the prefect always takes the same route day after day, and the girls know every inch of the way blindfolded.

Why can't we be allowed to walk along by ourselves? The Private School Prigs do. Why can't we?

That's what I want to know!

What do my readers think? Your Editor would very much like to know.

CUT THIS OUT

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FOR!

PHYLLIS told me afterwards of her dodge to escape the crocodile crawl, but I told her I thought she was extremely foolish.

She missed a jolly fine afternoon's sport.

The Prigs were defeated to a frazzle. Not one of them could throw a ball or handle a bat for toffee.

I can't understand Phyllis. We all like her very much. She is a real sport, not only in the literal sense of the word, but in the sense of honour. She will never let a chum down, and often has she submitted meekly to being punished in order to shield another girl.

I admire a girl who does that, but I have no patience with the girl who is constantly grumbling.

That is why Phyllis and I don't hit it off together so well as I should like.

She is a born grumbler, and she's never happy unless she can find something to grumble about.

She plays a fine game of tennis, and handles a racquet like a Mile. Lenglen; but if she can find no fault with the quality of the balls, she'll grumble about the net, and say it's too slack or too tight.

It is just the same when she's playing hockey or any other game. She plays well, but she will grumble.

I hate grumblers.

Her latest grievance is the crocodile crawl.

Now, I don't suppose there is one girl in the whole school who really likes the crocodile, but they realise it is a necessary evil, designed for their own good, and make the best of it.

It stands to reason that if the Head sees fit to make us walk along in an orderly procession, instead of straggling along in twos and threes when we go to the playing-fields or to church, she has the best reasons for so doing.

I admire and respect Miss Balding intensely. Her post as head-mistress of an important school is a very responsible one, and the rules and regulations that she rightly insists that we shall carry out are designed purely for our benefit.

Phyllis envies the Private School Prigs because they are allowed a little more freedom than we are, yet I doubt if the freedom accorded them does them any good.

It may be nice to stroll and straggle along to church on a Sunday morning in twos and threes, but surely it looks much nicer to walk along in an orderly procession, as we do.

After all, one has to think of the prestige of one's school.

We are all proud, from the humblest fag to the senior prefect, of our school, and it is our duty to make our school an institution to be proud of.

Girls require a certain amount of discipline. It is part of the school training. It is partly what we go to school for. A school at which no discipline obtained would not be a school to be proud of. At our school the teaching of discipline is just as important as the teaching of grammar or geography. We do not object to being taught grammar, so why should we object to being taught discipline. One is just as necessary to our welfare as the other.

Discipline, I should imagine, does not reach a very high standard at the little private school in the village that Phyllis is so fond of talking about and comparing with our own school, to our disadvantage.

If the girls at the private school were taught to behave themselves as nice girls should, I am sure they would not demean themselves by sneering and smirking at us when we pass.

To jeer and gibe as they do does not reflect credit on those responsible for their training. I am sure that none of our girls would ever be guilty of similar conduct.

I think if Phyllis, and other malcontents, would regard the crocodile crawl in the light in which I have tried to present it, they would be less inclined to condemn a practice which is designed expressly for their own good.

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The Opening Chapters of our Splendid New Serial!



By
JOAN INGLESANT.

CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY

RUTH HOPE, a beautiful, fair-haired girl of 15, who, with her father, has come to live at Rosedale Manor, formerly in the possession of the father of **SYLVIA SEVERANCE**, a dark-haired, vindictive girl a year or so older than Ruth.

Hardly has Ruth arrived at the Manor than Sylvia taunts her by saying that Ruth's father, John Hope, has no right to the possession of the estate—in other words, he has stolen it!

Ruth at first treats the statement with contempt, but Sylvia persisting in her accusations, Ruth goes to her father, and asks him point-blank as to the truth of all this. To her horror, he returns only an evasive answer.

Sylvia smiles triumphantly. "What did I tell you?" she cried. "Did he deny it? No! Because he couldn't!"

(Read on from here.)

"How Can I Enjoy What is Not Rightly Mine?"

OH! It is all false, unreal, hateful!"

The tears of a burning sorrow misted Ruth Hope's blue eyes as she looked down from her bedroom window and gazed out over the flower-coloured grounds of Rosedale Manor as it lay spread beneath her in the glory of its sunlight and its flowers.

Those grounds presented a sight that would have charmed other eyes than Ruth's—they would have given dreams to some girls—happy care-free dreams, but for her there were no visions—only bitter thoughts and a pain in her heart that hurt—how it hurt!

From the trees in the avenue and the side paths that ran off from the avenue, colour and gay bunting fluttered out on the soft and summery wind.

Just by the lily pool a marquee had been erected and, as Ruth looked down upon the beautiful scene, the laughter of a happy gathering rose like incense upon the air and came to her ears.

Ruth turned from the window and looked down at her new frock.

How bright and beautiful it was; but, oh, how it mocked her!

Her father expected her to be the hostess at this party he was giving to his tenants and the people who lived near to Rosedale Manor, but she knew that she would never be able to play the part.

She felt that they would see through the pretence of her smile.

"They will know—they will laugh behind their veiled smiles!" she whispered to her room. "They know the truth—just as Sylvia Severance knows the truth. Oh, daddy! why did you do what

you have done, why did you bring me here, when at Eversley we were so happy!"

Ruth bent her head in her hands and began to sob as though her heart was breaking.

A strange scene for sorrow when, below her, the tuneful notes of a gay tune were stealing into the air and coming to her ears.

Carriages and cars were coming up the drive, and soon—soon, it would be time for her to go down and act—yes, that was what it would mean, she told herself. Playing a part so that she might keep up the pretence that concealed a theft!

Oh, if only she could stay here, here in this little room, here where she could conceal her sorrow!

But no! The sound of footsteps on the stairs—the swish of a skirt—and then—

The turning handle and a cruel and smiling face looking into that little room, so colour and once so beautiful in Ruth's eyes.

Ruth swung round to see the enquiring glances of Sylvia Severance full on her. She did her best to conceal her tears, but could not hide them from those prying eyes.

"Your guests are waiting, Ruth!" said Sylvia in harsh accents. "It would not do to let them see those tears—those tears might betray you—they would betray you!"

Sylvia Severance laughed and came nearer to Ruth—a pale and weary-eyed Ruth.

"No wonder you weep!" she whispered. "No wonder you are afraid to keep up this pretence—no wonder you are nervous when you look around and you realise that none of this is yours by right, but simply yours by fraud—a fraud that will soon be discovered—must be discovered—you mark my words!"

Ruth shivered, but her eyes did waver as she faced Sylvia.

"You have told me this before!" she cried heatedly, and now with no sign of tears in her eyes. "How can you stay here—here in the home of a thief—why do you stay, knowing what you profess to know?"

Sylvia placed her arms akimbo and smiled indulgently.

"Do you think that I am fool enough to play the part your father wishes me to play?" she answered. "I stay for a reason best known to myself. You will go a long time before I go. This is my home and I stay, and I stay for a very good purpose, best known to myself!"

She paused. "And now, my Lady of the Manor!" she cried mockingly. "Your guests await you!"

Ruth's little hands were clenched, and she was pale and determined.

She must see this thing through as best she could, if only to show Sylvia that there was no cowardice in her heart—none!

"Thank you for coming to tell me!" she answered calmly "I will go to them now!"

Sylvia gave her a mock bow as she passed her and walked out on to the stairs, and Sylvia followed with the light of victory in her eyes.

Her eyes were alight, and she knew that her dress fitted her to perfection—little did she care that Mr. Hope had paid for her dress, just as he paid for her keep at the Manor. There were no such thoughts in the mind of the cruel-hearted girl.

She meant not to spare Ruth, and she did not spare her.

"See!" she whispered, as they came to the entrance to the Manor. "Look at that coat-of-arms above your head—is that your father's coat-of-arms—or mine—tell me that?"

But Ruth did not speak. With tired steps she walked in the direction of the smaller marquee that had been erected on the lawns, for it was there that the guests were to be received.

As Ruth walked she could see some of them. Honest farmers and their pink-cheeked children. Homely villagers and kind-eyed neighbours, and yet—

Ruth watched them dubiously. Their glances at her were strange, mysterious. She could see them talking amongst themselves.

With burning cheeks she walked along. A child courtised in front of her and handed her a bunch of field flowers.

Ruth took the flowers and wondered if the bow was a mockery, just as Sylvia had mocked her.

"They pay you homage!" She heard Sylvia's light laugh and the whispered phrase that stole into her brain.

From somewhere in a group of guests there came a deep laugh—Ruth heard the words, "Shouldn't wonder if it is true—struck me as being something of a mystery—perhaps this is to conceal things!"

She shuddered and paused—looked in the direction from which the words had come—and then walked on!

It was in her mind to find the speaker and demand an explanation but then the very weakness of her position gave her pause, and with a sinking heart she came to the little marquee where stood her father.

"Why, Ruthie," he whispered, "one would think that you were sad! How THE SCHOOL FRIEND.—No. 166.



"Look!" cried Sylvia vibrantly. "Look at that coat of arms! Is that your father's or mine? Tell me that!"

could you be so amidst all this beauty? They have come as my guests to honour you, and I want my little girl to be happy—so happy!"

Perhaps John Hope fancied she smiled, for she lowered her eyes and looked down at the country posey that was in her hands.

He laid his hand on her shoulder as a clergyman came forward.

"Ruth, here is the vicar!"

Ruth looked up, to find herself looking into the face of a silvery-haired old gentleman with the kindest eyes in all the world.

There was such honesty and sincerity on his face that she suddenly felt afraid, and, feeling so, dropped the bouquet so that it fell at his feet.

He picked it up and handed it to her. "No squire could have a lovelier daughter!" said the kind old vicar as he took her hand in his and held it. "But why so pale, child?"

The Rev. Ambrose Johnson, Vicar of Rosedale, looked up at John Hope.

"The excitement of entertaining so many people, and the heat, has taken the roses away for a moment, Mr. Hope," he murmured. "But they will come back—they will come back."

A little shudder ran through Ruth's frame.

Was he mocking her, as the child had done? Turning to her left, she could see the strange eyes of Sylvia smiling their hatred at her.

Sylvia self-assured and calm, was chatting to the vicar's wife.

Now, seeing the vicar walk away, she brought Mrs. Johnson forward.

The vicar's wife was just the opposite to her husband. She was thin, and her face was thin, and her lips were thin, and her voice was harsh.

"This is Miss Hope," said Sylvia, with veiled contempt. "You must meet Miss Hope, Mrs. Johnson."

"Oh, yes! Miss Hope, of course. I had forgotten, almost."

Mrs. Johnson raised her lorgnette as she spoke, and Ruth quavered before that rather rude glare from a pair of green eyes.

She could see the strange look in Mrs. Johnson's eyes, and she feared that Sylvia had already spoken to Mrs.

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Johnson of the awful matter that now obsessed Ruth's mind.

Listlessly Ruth shook hands and murmured some suitable words of pleasure at meeting the vicar's wife for the first time.

Mrs. Johnson laughed insincerely, and said she was charmed, and then, linking her arm in Sylvia's, withdrew from the small marquee.

"Inclined to be stuffy there, my dear," Ruth heard her say. "What a shy girl! Looked frightened. Now, you—"

There came the aftermath of Sylvia's laughter.

Ruth drew back as she heard that laughter. She realised at once what Mrs. Johnson suggested.

Sylvia was more fitted to be in this position than she was. Sylvia had more right to it. That was what she meant to signify by those words she had uttered.

She had not waited to chat. There had just been those formal words, and then the turn of the shoulder.

Ruth could see the vicar gazing after his wife. He coughed a little awkwardly, and followed in her wake, and Ruth was left alone with her father.

Mr. Hope seemed nervous and ill at ease.

He eyed Ruth anxiously.

"It is not too much for my little girl?" he queried.

Ruth shook her head.

"No, daddy," she whispered.

She determined to be brave. She must be brave! There were people here who were, perhaps, little tattlers. They would go away and say how nervous she had seemed. Perhaps it might harm her father.

But her heart was breaking, and she felt on the verge of collapse.

The vicar had returned with a host of farmers and their wives, and now Ruth found herself shaking hands with monotonous regularity, and endeavouring to say the right thing the whole time.

She was nervous now, and stammering in her greeting of the guests, and they looked at her with surprise; and to Ruth it seemed that they hurried to get out of the marquee.

Could she have fled the spot she would willingly have done so; but duty held

her there, and she carried on to the bitter end.

Ruth's hand trembled as she shook hands with her guests. She felt that she was acting one big lie. They could see that her eyes wavered. She felt sure of that. Their own eyes seemed to say: "She is the daughter of a thief. Her father stole this place. He is a thief!"

And outside the marquee the sneering eyes of Sylvia were watching Ruth at her task of entertaining.

Once or twice Ruth heard her cynical laughter, and, looking up, saw Sylvia surrounded by a gay and happy crowd, who fawned about Sylvia as though Sylvia were the squire's daughter, and not she.

Ruth bit her lips and tried to keep her courage up, but it was slowly oozing away.

Why should Sylvia be honoured so? Why should they treat Sylvia as though she were the host and not herself? Why?

Ruth soon found the answer to those questions. The answer was so simple of finding.

They looked upon Sylvia's father as squire still. They looked upon her father and herself as mere usurpers. Mr. Severance had been tricked out of his inheritance—out of his estate—and they knew it. It was on their mocking faces. It lay even in their gay laughter and badinage. They had come here to laugh at her father's short tenancy of Rosedale Manor. They knew that it would not be long before his crime was brought to book.

What would happen to her then? She could imagine what Sylvia would say and do then. It wasn't difficult to imagine Sylvia's attitude.

Her scornful contempt, her harsh laugh of triumph, and her extended finger that would point the way from her home.

And Ruth would be an outcast. Yes, she told herself, it would come, and it would be her most bitter moment.

"Come, Ruth! They are going to dance the Maypole dance on the lawn. It is a custom that has existed here for centuries."

She felt her father's hand on her arm, and she realised that the marquee was empty, and that the laughing and care-free guests were making for the lawns, led by Sylvia Severance.

It seemed that Sylvia had taken charge of the whole affair.

Sylvia, beautifully dressed in old rose and white, her colour picture hat suiting her locks to perfection, was going here, there, and everywhere amongst the villagers and farmers' wives.

"Yes, Miss Sylvia! No, Miss Sylvia! Thank you, m'lady!"

Ruth heard the phrases of respect, and Sylvia's gay laughter.

They were looking to Sylvia to entertain them and act as their hostess.

She, the real hostess, was not being taken any notice of. They did not pause to speak, even now that the formal introduction had been made.

Ruth caught at her father's hand and looked up into his face.

It was grave and thoughtful.

"My little girl must not be nervous," he said. "She must be happy and help to make things go with a swing. I look to you, dear!"

Ruth turned her eyes away.

It was so simple for her father to speak like this. But how difficult to do as he suggested! How could she be like Sylvia, when Sylvia had not the weight on her mind that she had?

Somehow she felt that her father was callous, cold, and heartless to her for letting her live in this false paradise.

"Oh, daddy," she whispered, "I can't—I can't!"

Ruth paused and hid her face in her hands, and he stopped and looked down at her.

"Is anything wrong, Ruthie?" he asked.

She did not answer.

"Ruthie, Ruthie," he whispered, "why do you not make yourself sociable, like Sylvia? Why don't you join your guests and join in the dance? See, Sylvia has taken her ribbon, and is going to dance with the other girls!"

They had come abreast of the maypole, and Ruth saw Sylvia waiting for the music to commence the dance.

She had instructed the musicians when to start, and she was looking mockingly, sneeringly, hatefully in Ruth's direction.

"Daddy, I can't!" Ruth whispered, drawing back as though those eyes lashed her.

"But why?" said Mr. Hope, surprised. "Why not try and enjoy the dance, as Sylvia will enjoy it? Look at Sylvia! She does not seem to have one worry in all the world!"

"No, daddy. She has no worries!"

"Then try, Ruthie—try and be happy!"

Ruth raised a pair of appealing, pleading eyes to his.

"Oh, daddy," she whispered brokenly, "why won't you speak? Why won't you answer that question I asked you? Why?"

John Hope looked into his daughter's face.

"Ruthie, Ruthie," he murmured strangely, "why not be happy when you can, and join in the dance? Why not—Ah, vicar!" he exclaimed, in tones of relief, as Ruth fancied. "I have been looking for you!"

He had turned from her, and had linked his arm through that of the Rev. Ambrose Johnson, who had been passing them as Ruth spoke.

The vicar looked with surprised eyes at Ruth.

"Is there anything wrong with your daughter, Mr. Hope?" he whispered. "She looks very pale. Not ill, I trust?"

John Hope forced a laugh.

"The excitement, you know, vicar!" he answered.

"Ah, yes, how nice—how very nice!" murmured the old clergyman. "So sweet to be young, so very sweet!"

He beamed at Ruth through his gold-rimmed spectacles, and Ruth felt that she would have been happy could the ground have opened at her feet and swallowed her up.

Her father was chatting away to the vicar, and now Ruth was left alone with her thoughts.

Bitter enough she found them to be. Why had her father avoided that question again? Surely he could have given her some answer to either confirm her worst fears, or calm them with a denial. But no. He was silent, and his silence spoke of guilt.

Ruth, with a pretence at getting a better view of the dance, drew away, and left him alone with the vicar, whilst she took up her stance on a little mound so that she could better watch the dancers.

But it wasn't the dance that held her eyes. She didn't see those graceful figures in their pretty white dresses. She saw rather the hopeless future that stretched before her.

"Ah, Ruth!"

Miss Hope was at her side. There was a frazzled smile on Miss Hope's face.

Ruth drew away, for the eyes of her aunt were quite hard.

"My dear," exclaimed Miss Hope,

"how really dowdy you do look! So pale, and see, your dress is torn!"

Ruth looked down, to see that a bramble was stuck in her dress, and that it had torn the muslin slightly.

A flush swept across her pale cheeks.

"Yes, aunt," she whispered.

Miss Hope laughed harshly.

"Why cannot you keep as neat and as spick-and-span as Sylvia?" she asked. "See how nice she looks, and she has been dancing—oh, so gracefully!"

She paused.

"Your place should be with your guests, Ruth. You seem sadly to have neglected your duties!"

Ruth drew herself up.

Her aunt was becoming unbearable. Oh, if only it were possible to get away from this hateful place—back to Eversley and the dear old servant who had been there with them, but who had been pensioned off as she was too old for further work.

But Eversley was empty now. It had been sold—sold, and this mockery of a place had been bought—no!—stolen!

Ruth saw that Sylvia, the dance finished, was walking towards them, and she nerved herself for a fresh ordeal. She looked about her for her father, but her father was not in sight.

Sylvia tripped lightly towards the now smiling Miss Hope, and, coming to the side of Ruth's aunt, she slipped her arm through Miss Hope's.

"You danced splendidly, Sylvia," said Miss Hope. "I don't know what we should have done without you to-day. You have worked miracles of entertaining. So courteous and so refined, Sylvia. It has been an eye-opener to me!"

Ruth flushed, felt awkward, and was about to walk away, when she saw the vicar's wife walking in their direction. She had no desire to be stopped by Mrs. Johnson.

"I did do rather well, didn't I?" said Sylvia. "Of course, someone had to entertain and enter into the dance, you know. If Ruth—"

"That is just what I have been saying!" said Miss Hope sharply. "I think Ruth's conduct has been outrageous! I sincerely hope that it was not your jealousy for Sylvia that has made you adopt this attitude, Ruth?"

That was more than Ruth could bear.

Clenching her little hands, she drew back, and looked at her aunt.

"I am not in the least jealous of Sylvia!" she answered.

As she spoke, the cunning and cruel eyes of Sylvia Severance watched her, and they were still watching her as, broken-hearted and in tears, Ruth walked back to the manor.

Her guests could do without her. They had shown that only too well. She wanted to be alone—alone with her thoughts, those black and shadowy doubts that were crowding in her mind as crows crowd into the sky at evening-time.

Down unfrequented paths she hurried until the lawns and their gay party lay well behind her.

She was weeping softly—weeping to herself!

At last she came to the broad front entrance to Rosedale Manor.

Where was her father? She would find him and demand the truth. She could not stand this any longer—not a moment longer.

There was a car on the drive, and, as Ruth walked forward, recognising in a flash that it was her father's car, it suddenly moved, and rolled down the drive with all the smoothness of its perfect engine.

Ruth's hand crept to her heart.

Why was the car here? Where was it going?

She ran forward in the direction it was going, and as she did so she saw a white and worried face—the face of the man who was the occupant of the car's coupe.

It was her father!

The blood drained from her face and her heart nearly ceased its beating.

What could this signify?

Breathless and bewildered in her mind, Ruth watched it disappear from view.

For how many minutes she waited there she did not know, but at last she turned and walked sadly back to the manor and entered the hall.

It was dark here after the glare of the sun on the gardens, but not so dark that she did not see the letter on the oaken chest in the hall.

Ruth ran towards it, for she had seen her name on it with eyes that had been made sharp through anxiety.



"Prying in your father's study, are you!" exclaimed her aunt. "Very well, he shall be told directly he returns!"

In a flash she had opened the envelope and had extracted the note that it contained.

"Ruth!" she read. "I have to hurry to London on most urgent business. I know that I can leave you in charge of the manor and your guests. I do not expect to be away for long. All my love, dearest! Dad."

That was all. He had gone, and this short note conveyed the fact.

Then, in its awful significance, it swept across her mind.

"Oh, daddy!" she cried. "It is true—it is true! Otherwise you would not have gone!"

The Locked Room.

"GOOD-BYE! I am so glad you were able to come!"

Ruth found herself murmuring the conventional words that speeded the parting guest, and to her there was hollow mockery in them.

How glad Ruth was when at last the final guest had departed, and she could hurry away to her room to conceal the outburst of tears that had threatened ever since the heartrending discovery of her father's letter.

There were no illusions in her mind now. That letter—his hurried departure—his grave demeanour—had all signified one thing, and one alone—and that thing was his guilt.

In the pillows of her little white bed she moaned his name, nor was there one gentle hand that could comfort her.

"Oh, daddy!" breathed Ruth. "If only you were here to explain!"

Ruth sat up suddenly and her tears faded away from her eyes.

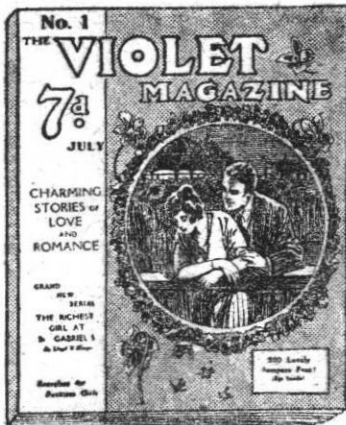
Could there be any elucidation of this mystery in his papers? Was it possible that his study might solve the problem? She wondered.

There was no harm, she told herself, in going down there to try and ease her mind, for unless she did ease her mind she felt that her reason would desert her.

As she stepped from her room and came on to the silent stairs an awful feeling swept over her that all hands were against her.

To her it seemed that even her father was against her. She felt that he had shown this by his action of deserting her.

*Packed with Tales of
Love and Romance*



NO. 1 NOW ON SALE

She stole below to find that the servants, busied with clearing up after the garden fete, had not troubled to light the gas in the great hall.

She came to the second landing and looked below her. The hall looked like a pit of blackness. No sound came save—

What was that?

Ruth paused and listened intently.

A scraping sound, accompanied by the sharp intake of breath had come to her ears to affright and surprise her.

What could that signify? Who breathed so, and what did that rasping note mean—that note that sounded quite noisy in the silence of the oak-pannelled hall.

Softly, very softly, with infinite caution, Ruth stole down the stairs, and now she could vaguely see the outline of a mailed figure standing by the dining-room door. Nearer to her was the door of her father's study, and as she looked in this direction, her fascinated gaze caught sight of something white.

A cry escaped her lips.

She paused, and as she paused there came a startled exclamation, something dropped with a clang to the ground, the sound of feet echoed through the hall.

A figure had been by that study door! A figure who, hearing Ruth's approach, had turned and had sped away, away round into the passage that ran beside the stairs.

Ruth bent over the banisters and caught sight of something white that, the next moment, disappeared into the complete blackness of the distant hall.

Then there was silence, deep and profound.

Her breath was almost stopping and her knees trembled beneath her, but now she ran rather than walked down the remainder of the stairs, and, in her urgency to discover what this mystery portended, her feet caught against an iron bar. She nearly fell, but steadying herself, she bent and picked the object up.

It was a big iron bar with a pointed end, and, to Ruth, it seemed strange that anyone should be in the hall of the manor with so heavy an object.

She was mystified—filled with wonder.

Her hand rose to the handle of the study door. She grasped the handle, and turning it, prepared to walk into the study, but, to her absolute astonishment, the door did not budge.

"Locked!"

The exclamation came involuntarily from her lips and with it came a cold feeling that swept through her as a chill wind sweeps through the wintry pines.

What could it mean? Why should her father lock his study?

Ruth trembled, and then the feeling came over her that perhaps her father had returned—perhaps he was working and had not wished to be disturbed.

She tapped lightly on the panel of the door, but no answer came to her tapping, only the echo as it stole through the hall.

Her hands gripped together, and now she felt full of fear.

Here was another mystery—another problem to add itself to all the other surprising happenings that had come with her advent to this new home.

She stood there in a spirit of undetermination. She did not know how to act—what to do. The situation was so difficult and complex. She could not go to her aunt and ask her to help her unravel this mystery. She knew that she would get scant sympathy from Miss Hope.

With listless steps she walked away down the hall, and it was to find that the hall door was open.

Into the starlit gardens, with their scented flowers and the white mist coming up with the evening, she walked, and it was there that the idea came to her.

Ruth broke into a run.

Once she fancied that a figure passed her in the mist; once an ominous rustling amidst the undergrowth made her feel that she was being watched.

She beat the nervousness down, however, and came at last beneath a little mullioned window, and, looking up, she sighed.

Ruth was below her father's study.

How well she remembered her first evening at the Manor, when, walking through the grounds at eventide, she had seen the little red lamp on her father's desk, and had clasped her hands in ecstasy at the thought of the restfulness of their new home.

How those hopes had faded—what an idle dream that had been!

In the place of that wonderful feeling had come distrust and unhappiness—a sorrow that was robbing her cheeks of their rightful colour and her heart of all hope.

Her intention was firm, and the fact that the window above her was unlocked only added to the intention.

Somo little way away was the gardener's hut, and in that hut she had watched him at work on the ladder that he was mending.

Ruth turned now, and hurried in the direction of the hut.

The old and rather tumble-down door was ajar, and, pushing it open, she had no difficulty in locating the object that she sought.

It was the ladder.

She knew that with that she could find her way into her father's study.

The ladder, light for the gardener, was not light for Ruth's little hands, but by dint of determination she managed to bear it towards the window and rear it up against the ledge.

When she had made it safe she looked about her.

There was no one in sight—not a soul, and had there been the mist would have helped to shroud her movements in their generous folds.

Ruth grasped the ladder, and with all the carefulness that she could command she stole above, and, perching herself on the ledge, she opened the window out so that, without difficulty, she could make her way into the room.

Just one glance below, and the next moment she had stepped gingerly into the study of John Hope.

And now the feeling that she was spying swept down upon her.

But then her frightened brain told her that it was not wrong to act thus. That she had a right to know what all this mystery was—a real right.

Walking towards the switch, she switched on the electric light, and then, not taking the precaution to draw the black curtains that covered the study window, she bent over the desk.

There were papers upon it, and she bent over these.

"Deed of Agreement for Occupancy of Rosedale Manor."

The phrase was so much Greek to her, the contents of that blue-coloured document were even more puzzling.

This told her nothing!

Was there no clue of any kind?

She searched about, and, as her eyes scanned the desk, her hands crept to her heart and her lips trembled. It was as much as she could do to suppress a cry.

Papers, marked "Important," lay on

the desk. Those papers held the secret, must hold it. She picked them up, and slipped them in her blouse. Terrified, quickly she did this. Now the papers were safe—quite safe.

There was something written on the blotting-pad—something that held her, compelled her, frightened her.

And small it was, although, in its paucity of words, it held so much meaning—so much dreadful significance.

"Ruth must never know!"

That was all, but it was enough—more than enough. It seemed to add further evidence to a case that was already condemning in its other features.

The tears started to her eyes. "Who is there—who is there? Speak at once!"

Ruth started back, and her hands gripped at the desk.

A voice had boomed through the night—an unmistakable voice.

Her aunt's! "Come into the light at once—there are servants here, you cannot escape!"

The light had been seen—it had been seen. Miss Hope fancied she was a burglar—a burglar in her father's study!

It was too late to switch the curtains over the window—much too late. She would be seen.

"Come to the window at once—I mean to arouse the house!"

Ruth clasped her hands to her heart. The ladder was being removed; she heard it scrape against the window-ledge, and then fall dully into the lush-flowers beneath the study window.

She was trembling. The prospect of a night in the study confronted her; perhaps she might escape without Miss Hope discovering her.

"Come to the window I say!" Miss Hope was defiant—determined. Ruth wavered and was lost.

With unsteady steps she walked to the window, and, looking down, saw the hard eyes of Miss Hope glancing up at her.

"Ruth!" The cry was one of amazement. "Yes, aunt."

Miss Hope was silent for a moment. "So," she whispered at last, "prying in your father's study—eh? John must know of this, my girl! He shall know, and the moment he returns!"

"But, aunt—" Her hands stole to the papers at her breast.

"Do not speak!" cried Miss Hope. "You have given me shock enough. I fancied you to be a burglar, instead I find you to be a spy!"

As she spoke Ruth turned towards the door. How foolish she had been. Why had she not thought of escape by that way?

She was going to walk towards it, but suddenly a sound came to her ear. The handle was being turned; the rustle of clothes against the wood came to her ears.

Ruth peered out of the window, and was about to speak, but Miss Hope's icy tones prevented it.

"Move from that room if you dare!" she cried. "I am coming up, and now. Wait for me, and unlock the door immediately I knock!"

With that she hurried away.

She left a trembling girl behind her—a girl who, seating herself in her father's chair, looked with listless eyes at the phrase he had written on the blotting-pad.

Miss Hope must not see that; no one must see that.

She tore the condemning phrase off the pad, and, rolling the blotting-paper

into a ball she slipped the ball of paper inside her blouse, to lie concealed with the precious papers.

She was none too soon. A commanding tap came at the study door.

Ruth rose to her feet, and, walking across the room, turned the key, and, opening the portal, looked into the blazing eyes of her father's sister.

They were hard and condemning. Miss Hope shook her head, and glowered down at Ruth.

"A pretty action," she murmured, with a bitter smile. "You venturing where you were not permitted. Was not the locked door enough to caution you that your father's study was sacred to himself—was not that enough?"

A soft laugh greeted Miss Hope's words, and Ruth, looking up, saw that Sylvia was regarding her with mocking eyes.

Sylvia was holding a candle above her head—its rays were falling full on Ruth's pale face.

"No wonder you look frightened," said Miss Hope. "No wonder! A fine

Suddenly Sylvia gave a sharp exclamation of well-simulated surprise, and, bending down, picked up the iron object against which Ruth had kicked.

"Why, look at this, Miss Hope!" she cried. "What can this be doing here?" "An iron bar!" Surprise lay in Miss Hope's tones.

She picked it up, her face grim and forbidding, and, holding it as though it were a whip, she turned to Ruth.

"So," she whispered—"so! Lift your light, Sylvia, dear," she added. "Throw it on the door!"

Sylvia, with a precision that was rather peculiar, shone the light on the damaged woodwork.

Someone had evidently been trying to force Mr. Hope's study door.

It was gashed, and paint was scraped off.

Ruth fell back with surprise at what she saw.

Whose hand had done that—whose? "Ah, I see!" exclaimed Miss Hope bitingly. "Not satisfied with failing to force the door, you concocted a cleverer plan—"



"Don't stand there, Ruth, and tell untruths!" thundered Miss Hope. "You have been guilty of an act of a common burglar!"

story to tell my brother—his daughter a spy—perhaps worse—"

"Aunt—" Ruth stepped back as though she had been struck.

"Ah, I see that you have no explanation—not even an idle excuse!" cried Miss Hope. "I thought as much!"

Sylvia laughed lightly.

"I thought that we had caught a burglar, Miss Hope," said Sylvia. "I heard the noise in the room, and came here. The door was locked—"

"Burglar! Burglar!" exclaimed Miss Hope. "Perhaps that was it! Tell me, girl!" she added. "Was it an attempted theft?"

Ruth clenched her hands.

"I won't be treated so; I won't be spoken to so!" she cried, the tears brimming over her eyes. "You are cruel—cruel! Oh, daddy, daddy—where are you, daddy?"

"Don't act!" came the cruel rejoinder. "This is not the time to act; it is the time to tell the—I demand the truth! I am in charge here, and I mean to know why you were here, and at this hour!"

"What do you mean, aunt—what do you mean?" cried Ruth. "You accuse me of—"

"Accuse you!" whispered Miss Hope incisively. "No accusation is needed. You—you, girl, tried to force the door! Is not that bar evidence enough?"

"It's not true—not true!"

"Don't stand there and lie like that!" thundered her aunt. "It is as plain as this iron bar is round—your hand—your hand alone sought to force the door! The action of a common burglar!"

Behind the mocking smile in Sylvia's eyes lay cunning and deceit.

"Spying on her father; trying to force his study open! Fancy any daughter doing these things, Miss Hope! How terrible!" she whispered.

(Ruth—accused of trying to burgle her own father's study! How will Mr. Hope view her action when he returns? You must tell all your friends about this powerful serial, and get them to place a standing order with their news-agent NOW to avoid being disappointed.)

THE SCHOOL FRIEND.—No. 166.

The Schoolgirl Caravanners!



A Magnificent New, Long Complete Tale of the Girls of Cliff House School, featuring Babs, Mabs & Co., on a Holiday Tour.
By HILDA RICHARDS.

On the Road!

HURRY up, girls!" "Look out the horse doesn't bite you, Mabs!" "Hurry along with those bags, Dolly. You would be the last, of course!"

There was a scene of bustling excitement in the quadrangle at Cliff House School. Ten members of the Fourth Form were attracting more than their share of interest on this jolly breaking-up day, and the two gaily-painted caravans which stood, harnessed and ready, close to the gates, were chiefly responsible for the excitement.

"You'll be in the ditch before you get to Friar-dale!" Grace Woodfield of the Fifth called out. "Or else over the hedge!"

"No, I expect Bessie will go right through the bottom of it," said Flora Cann. "That back axle doesn't look any too strong as it is."

"He, he, he! Unless Dolly Jobbing—he, he, he! goes and sets fire to it," added Angelica Jelly and went off into an excited tittering.

Barbara Redfern laughingly called her party together—Mabs, Marjorie, Clara, Dolly, Flap, Phyllis, Freda, Peggy and Augusta—nine!

"Come on, girls!" Babs exclaimed. "Don't worry too much about them. If we're going to do all these funny things we had better be making a start with it. Hallo! Where on earth is Bessie Bunter?"

"I say, have they gone? Have they started without me? Where are they?"

A ready shout from the doorway proclaimed the appearance of the fat girl of the Fourth.

There was a subdued chuckle as soon as they saw her.

Bessie Bunter's face was very red, and her large spectacles were perched crookedly on her nose. She carried an enormous, shabby, brown bag, which was evidently causing her considerable trouble.

"My hat!" ejaculated Clara Trevlyn. "She's bringing the study furniture!"

Bessie Bunter saw them, beamed on them, and came puffing more breathlessly than ever in their direction.

"What the dickens have you got there, Bessie?" gasped Babs, surveying the bulging bag. "You've dumped one lot of luggage in here already!"

"This has got to go, too, Babs!" puffed Bessie. "Oh dear, I don't know whatever you girls would do without me looking after you like this. Just wait a minute—"

"But—"

"What on earth—why, she's gone again!"

Bessie Bunter, without even waiting to hear their exclamations of astonishment, had scuttled off towards the back

of the building, and was rapidly disappearing from sight!

"Hitch an elephant on the front, Babs," said Clara resignedly. "We shall never do it otherwise!"

"But what can she have possibly brought this time?" said Mabel Lynn in an amused voice. "We saw her pack everything."

She tried the weight of the bag that Bessie had dumped and abandoned.

"Good gracious!" gasped Mabs. "We can't expect any horse to pull this lot as well, Babs! I'm going to look inside and see what's in it!"

Mabel Lynn did so. The other ten members of the caravan party looked inside it and gasped.

"She's been raiding every study!" exclaimed Augusta laughing.

At the very top were two frying-pans, which Dolly Jobbing instantly recognised as her own.

These were removed to reveal three spirit stoves, several bundles of firewood, and quite a number of tins containing fruit and fish. Then they saw a rolling-pin, a set of basins, a sieve, and other culinary odds and ends. Stuffed in the corners there seemed to be dozens of small cake and pie tins.

"My giddy hat!" said Clara Trevlyn, quite a number of times.

"Here we are, girls!" cried Bessie Bunter's voice again.

This time the girls looked at Bessie almost speechlessly. It was a bicycle they saw this time. Strapped on the bicycle were a broken and antiquated picnic basket, an old easel stand, a camp stool that looked imperfect, a battered cricket bat, and sundry other odds and ends.

"Phew! Oh dear!" puffed Bessie Bunter. "This seems to be the lot. I don't think I've forgotten anything, girls!"

"Aren't you going to bring your bed as well?" said Clara very seriously. "And there's the Fourth Form classroom you've forgotten about!"

"Ha ha, ha!"

"Oh, really!" expostulated Bessie. "Blessed if I can see anything to giggle at! After I've gone to all the trouble of carrying this stuff about—"

"But we can't take it, dear! So I'm afraid you'll have to cart it all back again!" said Babs, unable to keep from laughing. "It isn't a pantehnicon, you know; and there are one or two others to go in it besides you. We've got your luggage in already."

Bessie Bunter gave Babs a speechless blink. But Babs was proof against speechless blinks.

It was an indignant but wiser Bessie Bunter who returned to the school with the bag full of cooking utensils, while Clara pushed Bessie Bunter's bicycle back to the shed.

"Are you ready, girls?" called a cheery voice.

Barbara Redfern's Aunt, Gladys, who had offered, to their delight, to accompany them on their holiday trip, appeared a few moments later with Miss Primrose at her side.

"All ready, aunt, when Bessie Bunter appears again," said Babs laughing. "Hallo, here she comes!"

Bessie Bunter came whizzing out of the doorway at a speed that looked suspiciously as though she feared being left behind after all.

"If you'll take the reins, Aunt Gladys," Babs suggested.

"With pleasure, my dear," she replied. And Aunt Gladys perched herself on the shafts, and taking the reins, spoke to the horse.

"A cheer for Miss Primrose, girls!" Babs cried, as the horse started.

"Hurrah, hurrah!" they yelled joyously.

Flap Derwent took the reins of the second caravan, and it followed.

"Here, I say! Help! I'm not in yet! I say, Aunt Gladys, I've been left out!" piped Bessie.

Babs looked at her in surprise.

"Well, what ever do you want to get in for, Bessie?" she exclaimed. "Can't you see we're walking?"

"What?" said Bessie. "Walk? I'm blown if I can see any holiday in that! I'm not going to jolly well walk when there's a caravan! What's it for, if it isn't to ride in?"

Babs and Mabs explained just where Bessie Bunter was wrong—which didn't seem at all a pleasing explanation to Bessie.

"I consider you've got me here under false pretences!" she said indignantly. "Fancy taking it in turns to ride in that stupid old thing! I'm sure I shall lose my fine figure tramping along like this!"

Bessie Bunter's was the only complaining voice, however, and her complaints gradually died away when she found the speed was not excessive.

The caravans were fairly well loaded and the horses were being allowed to take their time.

The road they had chosen was narrow and tree-grown and shaded from the hottest sun. It was an ideal day for a start, and the girls were in the highest spirits imaginable. They fell almost at once into eager conversation concerning the first place at which they had decided to call—Sunmold, some fifteen miles away.

Sunmold was a quaint and picturesque little village, from which Aunt Gladys suggested they could take a good many outings, and a meadow had been rented for at least a week's stay.

They had covered a good many miles by the time dinner-time came. According to Bessie Bunter's watch, they had already passed several dinner-times; but

Bessie's watch suffered from the same eagerness, apparently, that its owner did.

They stopped on a village green and ate their first open-air meal, and it was a huge success.

There was a certain amount of rivalry, of course. Babs, in charge of No. 1 caravan, tried to excel Marjorie Hazeldene, who was in charge of No. 2, in the speed at which the meal was served.

Thanks to Bessie Bunter's help, No. 1 scored heavily.

They started off again in excellent spirits. Here at last they could really feel that they were right away from school and the neighbourhood they knew. The blue sky and the sweet open air made an irresistible appeal to all of them.

"It's a real holiday!" Babs declared. "I wonder we've never tried it before, don't you, Mabs? I think we're going to have the time of our lives with this!"

"I'm sure we shall," said Mabs. "My word! There goes Freda again! She's found some fresh jokes already!"

"It's almost time!" laughed Augusta Anstruther-Browne.

"Well, we've not made a bad start, have we, girls," Babs exclaimed, "considering all the prophecies that were made about us? The caravan certainly hasn't gone into the ditch yet, but—"

"Ha, ha, ha! Look! There goes Bessie, anyway!" pealed Mabel Lynn.

It was true! There was a shriek of laughter as Bessie disappeared from view—especially as she had at that moment been in the act of endeavouring to clamber into No. 1 van to obtain a ride out of her turn!

"Ow-wow-wow!" shrieked the invisible fat girl. "Nettles!"

Bessie Bunter's head appeared over the edge of the ditch.

"Ha, ha, ha! Poor old Bessie!" chuckled the girls.

"I'm blessed if I can see anything funny in a girl falling into a ditch!" declared the fat girl wrathfully, regarding their amused faces. "I've stung myself all over with those horrid old nettles! I'm sure my arm will swell up. You'll have to take me in the caravan now until I'm better."

"But if your arm swells up very much, Bessie," said Clara sweetly, "you might never be able to get out again. I think we had better keep you down here and be on the safe side. What do you say, girls?"

"It—it isn't as bad as that," said Bessie hastily.

But the caravans were starting again. Bessie Bunter blinked indignantly from them to her alleged injured arm, and made sundry muttered remarks that were by no means complimentary to anyone. But she made no more attempts to board a moving van.

It was nearing tea-time when they had at last begun to draw near to Sunmold. (According to Bessie it was nearly supper-time!)

Aunt Gladys suggested that they should reach the village before stopping again, and the resolution was carried, with only one dissenter.

"This is the shortest way," said Aunt Gladys, when they came to a fork in the road. "It's a bit hilly for the horses; but we can take it gently, I'm sure."

They turned from the main road into a narrow lane that began to lead uphill.

They were half-way up the hill when Aunt Gladys called a halt.

"It's hard work for the horses, girls," she said. "If we give them a short rest here they will finish in quite good style."

"Yes, Aunt Gladys," said Flap Derwent at once. "It would be a shame to work them too hard when we ourselves are having such an enjoyable time, especially as—"

Honk, honk! She broke off and turned abruptly round.

Unnoticed by them, a powerful and luxurious motor-car had turned into the lane and had swiftly drawn near.

The Angry Motorist.

HONK, honk! The burly, red-faced man who sat at the wheel sounded his horn again.

"What're you doing there? What's the matter with you?" he called in a hectoring and domineering voice.

Flap Derwent, although surprised, turned and answered him politely.

"I'm afraid you will have to wait for a few moments now, sir," she said. "The horses must have a short rest here—"

"Wait be bothered!" cried the motorist pompously. "Apparently you don't know who I am! Whip those horses up and get on at once! I can't wait here all day for your trumpy caravans. Are you going to get on?"

Flap Derwent turned on him with flashing eyes.

"No, we are not! And if you were a gentleman you wouldn't make such a demand! If you are in such a hurry

As soon as the horses were properly rested, of course, they started on again, and the owner of the car followed them.

He seemed to take a bullying delight in rushing the car forward in sharp little jerks, so that it came each time within inches only of the girls, who followed the second caravan.

At the top of the hill there was an open space at the side of the lane. As the caravans drew in to it the car shot forward and was quickly passing them.

"Impudent little minxes!" cried out the red-faced man. "I'd like to make you sorry for this! I know who you are all right."

And with that curious threat, the car had shot on, and was driven recklessly down the hill that led to the sweet sunlit village lying just below.

"Of all the bullies, I reckon he takes the biscuit!" said Babs indignantly. "I wonder who ever he can be?"

Aunt Gladys shrugged her shoulders.

"Thank goodness such men are rare, anyway!" she said. "As for his empty threat—well, I don't suppose we are likely to see him again. And now I think we had better get on into the village, girls, because then we can take the caravans to our meadow in the grounds of Keighley Hall."



BESSIE'S EQUIPMENT!

"Phew!" puffed Bessie Bunter. "This seems to be my little lot. I don't think I've forgotten anything."

perhaps you can go another way round. Is it as urgent as that?"

"Don't you dare to speak to me like that, my girl!" thundered the car owner, half-rising in his seat. "I have more respects given me than that in these parts. I can tell you! I sha'n't forget such insolence! Two common caravans barring the road! Whip those horses up!"

"We shall do nothing of the kind!" answered Flap. "It would be absolute cruelty to the poor animals when they are so tired. In another minute we shall be able to go on again."

"So you dare tell me to wait?" thundered the bullying man.

Flap Derwent turned away with a disgusted shrug of her shoulders. Perhaps she felt the unreasonable demand more keenly than the others, but all of them seemed to be very much of the same opinion.

Honk, honk! The infuriated car owner was left to address his further remarks to the empty air. If he had asked more politely it would have been different. The Cliff House girls certainly had no use for anyone who behaved in such an offensive and unpleasant manner.

"Yes, that's the best plan," said Babs. And they started off, in spite of Bessie Bunter's hungry protests, and were soon entering Sunmold village.

An obliging village constable directed them at once to their pitch. They entered by the gate that he pointed out, and found themselves in a very pleasantly situated field adjoining the grounds of a large and imposing country house that they guessed at once was Keighley Hall, from whose owner the site had been rented.

"And now for tea, girls," said Aunt Gladys.

Bessie Bunter was galvanised into action.

It was not a race between No. 1 and No. 2 this time—it was a "walk over" for No. 1.

To a hearty and very pleasant meal the girls sat down after their first day's journey.

When they had finished, and finished talking, Aunt Gladys suggested that it would be a good idea to sally forth in a "foraging party." Leaving Flap Derwent and Phyllis Howell and Clara to attend to the horses and turn them out to graze, while Peggy Preston obligingly

washed up the tea things, the others went along the quiet little village street to the one grocery shop they had seen as they came through.

Inside the shop a timid little man gave them a nervous greeting, and started with unusual haste to take their order.

Aunt Gladys bought liberally, in view of their intention to stop several days, and when everything had been packed in the baskets, the bill was made out.

It was when she glanced at it to check the various items, that she received a genuine shock.

"These charges—surely you have made some mistake?" she protested mildly. "This charge for biscuits, for instance. Why, it's double the usual price! And as for the tongue—"

The timid little man leant across the counter.

"It's the gov'nor's orders, ma'am!" he said, in a sort of whisper.

"Then you are not the proprietor?"

"No, ma'am. I used to be until a little while ago," came the confused answer. "Those are the regular charges we make now."

Aunt Gladys looked at the bill again, and a touch of colour crept into her cheeks. It was really a preposterous bill.

"So much for this, and so much for that," she murmured. "My dear man, I never heard of such a thing in my life! If the proprietor expects us to pay all this, I am afraid he is very much mistaken."

"I'm sorry, ma'am, but I cannot make any reductions," said the little man, looking very confused. "But the proprietor's here now, if you would like to see him."

"Indeed, I should!" declared Aunt Gladys.

The man disappeared from behind the counter, and went into a small room at the back.

After a moment's silence a loud voice shouted something, and steps were heard.

A burly, red-faced man appeared in the shop, and from the girls came a simultaneous gasp of surprise.

The proprietor of the store was none other than the blustering and insolent driver of the motor-car they had met on the hill!

He gave them a curt and triumphant sort of nod, as though he had already guessed their identity, and, coming to the counter, exclaimed:

"What's this? What's all this about? You object to my charges, is that it? Perhaps you'd like to tell me so to my face?"

"Indeed, I have no objection!" said Aunt Gladys, in her sweet way. "I must admit that I consider your charges for ordinary goods rather exorbitant."

"Oh, indeed! You do, do you? I suppose you think that you own the village?" asked the burly man, with heavy sarcasm. "Let me tell you that this is my business. Take the things, or leave them, I don't care. Those are my prices. You'll find it's a good distance to another shop!"

Aunt Gladys stiffened.

"I quite understand," she said.

"If you people think—"

"You have said enough without going any further," put in Aunt Gladys. "I have no wish to argue with you at all! We will buy just the things that we absolutely require, and you can have the others back. I have said all I wish to say to you, sir!"

They came out of the shop with a very much smaller basketful than would otherwise have been the case.

"No wonder he's got such a fine motor-car," said Babs, "if that's the way he carries on business! But the people must be fools to patronise him!"

"Unfortunately there doesn't seem to

be another shop, girls," said Aunt Gladys, looking around.

"Then why doesn't someone open one, I wonder?" speculated Babs.

Bessie Bunter came forward with a bright suggestion.

"I say, girls! Suppose we start a shop ourselves in the caravan—cakes and things, you know? If you put me in charge, I'll see you do a roaring trade!"

"I'm afraid," said Babs, laughing, "the trade would be rather too roaring for us, Bessie. I don't think we had better dabble in shopkeeping. Anyway, we sha'n't go to that place again, unless we're obliged to—especially now we know who the proprietor is!"

They were only half-way back, when Clara Trevlyn came hurrying to meet them.

She called when still some distance away:

"Whom do you think has been to see us, girls?"

There was a chorus of speculation, to which Clara laughingly put an end by exclaiming:

"The very last person you'd expect, I'm sure. You had hardly started out for the shopping, before Miss Chantrey came along on her motor-bike. She's stopping with some friends not a mile away, and we've all been invited out this evening."

"Miss Chantrey?" Babs cried. "Why, how topping! I hadn't the faintest notion she was coming here, had you?"

"Are we invited out to supper, Clara?" asked Bessie Bunter eagerly.

"Right, first guess, Fatima!" said Clara.

"Good old Miss Chantrey!" cheered Bessie Bunter, capering delightedly.

Clara Trevlyn went on to explain.

"We're to go out and see her at half-past seven, girls," she said.

"Miss Chantrey has taken a bungalow with some friends, and they are going to lead the open-air life. We're to have a giddy picnic supper at half-past seven. Of course, I promised we'd all go out. We're not to make up our minds for anything too like a banquet, being so many of us"—here Bessie Bunter's face fell noticeably—"but with the Chanter to lead us, we shall be able to have a topping sing-song!"

"I should just think we shall!" said Babs.

And, greatly heartened by that unexpected invitation, they went on in the direction of their camping-ground—their experiences with the gentleman who drove so recklessly about the roads, and overcharged for his groceries, almost forgotten.

Bessie in Search of a Picnic!

"OH dear! Oh, I say! Wh-where are they?"

Bessie Bunter sat up abruptly and stared round the caravan.

It was empty. She scrambled from the bunk with quite unusual rapidity, and peered out of the window. The meadow outside was devoid of human beings as well. The only moving creatures were the two tethered horses.

"Mum-mum-my goodness!" gasped Bessie Bunter, and her movements became more agitated than ever.

Bessie had been asleep and dreaming. She had dreamt of a most beautiful banquet. Unusual exercise had thrown all her thoughts into that channel to-day. Unfortunately it was only a dream.

"Babs! I say, Babs! It's no good hiding from me!" cried Bessie Bunter, as she stumbled down the steps of the

caravan, and gazed around the empty meadow. "It's all right, you girls—you can come back! I can see you all!"

After a long and uninspiring pause, Bessie repeated the invitation less hopefully.

"Oh, my goodness!" gasped Bessie fearfully. "Surely they'd never be such mean cats as to go without me!"

Bessie hastened back to the caravan and looked at the clock. The time was getting on for half-past seven—the time of the picnic supper with Miss Chantrey. Bessie had been dreaming about that picnic, on a rather more elaborate scale than they might hope to discover it.

"They must be nearly there by now—oh, the greedy cats!" said Bessie, quite venomously. "They've jolly well gone off and left me behind! But it—it isn't like Babs to do that. Pip-perhaps she didn't know I was in the horrid old caravan!"

It seemed more than possible to Bessie, now she came to think of it.

The dreadful suspicion dawned in her mind that it was entirely her own fault. There had been jobs of erecting tents and cleaning up some of the tinware, and none of them had appealed to Bessie. She had announced her intention of going for a walk, and even of looking Miss Chantrey up, before creeping quietly into the caravan for a little nap to get her strength up!

Subtly had had its own reward!

"They've gig-gone—there's no doubt about that!" gasped Bessie, after peering into the tents, in both caravans, and even under them. "They've all gone off and left me. I'll be late for that supper, even if I hurry. Oh dear! Where did Clara say the place was?"

Bessie Bunter grabbed her hat, and made frantic efforts to think. If only a picking was left it would be considerably better than nothing.

"It was over the little bridge, I think," Bessie mused. "Then you turn round a corner by some silly old tree—an evergreen or something. I'm sure Clara said it wasn't far. I'll find it somehow!"

The fat girl set off in hot and very worried pursuit of the missing caravanners.

At the bottom of the meadow in which they were camped there was a streamlet spanned by a couple of old and shabby planks. Bessie surveyed it with considerable agitation.

"That's a bridge, anyway," she said. "Must be the one I want. It's an old bridge, but if they've gone over it, I suppose I can. Oh dear! I hope it doesn't give way!"

Bessie danced across the shaking planks very much like a cat on hot bricks.

"And that's that, anyway," she said, on reaching the other side. "Now, I wonder which way I go? Straight on, I should think. It looks as though there's a footpath."

Bessie went on, anxiously looking for the tree which Clara had mentioned. It was a very difficult situation. There were many kinds of trees, and Bessie had not the foggiest notion to which sort of tree Clara had referred.

"Big tree over there," Bessie muttered suddenly. "I believe Clara said an evergreen." She regarded it thoughtfully. "It's green enough, anyway. I think that must be the one. Oh dear! I'll have to hurry now, or there won't be anything left!"

Bessie rolled on breathlessly. She was right out in the fields now, walking along beside a low wooden fence. There was no sign of Miss Chantrey's

bungalow, but Bessie's eyes gleamed when she suddenly saw a gate in the fence.

"That's the way in, without a doubt!" she declared.

A shady, winding path led through a belt of trees to a spacious lawn. Bessie came to the lawn and stopped, gasping. It was a sweetly pretty retreat, provided with summer-houses and basket chairs innumerable. Something else, however, first caught Bessie's eyes.

"My goodness!" she gasped.

A spotless cloth covered quite an expanse of the lawn. On that cloth were many dishes piled with appetising food. Bessie saw fancy cakes and pastries, jellies, dainty sandwiches, and other rich fare.

She gave a subdued cheer and capered delightedly.

"Hurrah! I'm the first one here after all!" chortled Bessie Bunter excitedly. "I must have discovered a short cut. I've raced them! Won't they be surprised when they find how quickly I've come. Trust me to find a picnic—Clara always admits I've got a bump of direction!"

Bessie went closer, and the sight of the good things made her mouth water with anticipation. She had even stretched her hand out to sample a cake before a thought came to her.

"I—I suppose I'd better wait until they come," she mused. "Babs would say it was greedy—she's so frightfully particular. Oh dear! I do wish they'd buck up! I'm simply famished after—the long wait since tea!"

Bessie went back and peered along the path, but there was no one in sight. She crossed the lawn and peered eagerly in the other direction. A hungry impatience began to possess her.

"Wish they'd hurried like I have—they can't be a bit keen," grumbled Bessie. "It's wasting food to give it to girls who can't appreciate it any better than this. I—I've got such a sinking feeling, too!"

Bessie went back and surveyed the repast. Her hand went out again—and stopped. Conscience began to trouble Bessie Bunter. It was rather greedy to start before the others. And yet—

"I—I—I'll just have one!" Bessie compromised. "They'll never miss that. I must have something to get my strength up, so—so that I can make plenty of jokes when they arrive."

Bessie honestly intended only to have one.

But it was a beautiful cream bun! It seemed simply to melt in her mouth and vanish. Before she knew what she was doing another one was in her hand.

"Well, just one more," Bessie said, after a quick but fruitless blink round. "These top ones are bound to get dry being left out here so long. Oh dear! I am thirsty, too!"

The lemonade had real chunks of lemon and lumps of ice floating in it.

"Just one!" said Bessie, and filled a glass. "They can't grumble about that, after such a hot day. No one knows how thirsty I get, or they wouldn't be so horribly stingy with the ginger-beer."

The lemonade was glorious. Bessie looked at it, hesitated, and refilled her glass.

"Lovely! But it does make a girl hungry," commented Bessie, gazing back to the waiting feast. "I—I think I'd better have just one more. The Chanter won't mind. She'd be sorry to think of me sitting here and nearly starving to death!"

Bessie tried the sandwiches, and had had three before she discovered that there was another kind. The first had been so excellent that she had to make a comparison. The fat girl's resolution

began to waver under the difficult task of deciding which of the sandwiches was the nicest. She had tried them all several times before she noticed how the pile had diminished.

"Um! Oh!" said Bessie, looking at them. "I—I'll have to tell them that I've had my share of sandwiches. I'd better try one of those cakes to see if they're getting dry out here, and I can cover them up if they are!"

Bessie tried quite a number of the cakes with every evidence of satisfaction. They weren't a bit dry! Seldom had she tasted quite such appetising morsels as those were!

And by then Bessie had, as it were, got into her stride. Another glass of lemonade only seemed to increase her hunger. The beautiful resolution to wait heroically faded from her mind. From the cakes to the sandwiches, and the sandwiches to the jellies, Bessie went with fine impartiality.

"I'll tell them I've had my grub! Couldn't wait," Bessie told herself. "I'll be all the better able to talk to them and make them laugh. My word, these buns are ripping!"

the meaning of this impertinence?" thundered the red-faced man.

"You're n-n-not Miss Chantrey?" said Bessie feebly.

"What?"

"I—I mean, doesn't Miss Chantrey live here?"

"Miss Chantrey?"

"The girl is trying to give some excuse—do not listen to her, George!" broke in the woman in an ill-tempered and unpleasant tone. "She shall be very sorry for this!"

"Oh, dud-dud-dear! I—I am sorry!" quavered Bessie. "I—I thought Miss Chantrey lived here. I must have made some mistake. But I—I was only tut-tut-trying the things!"

"Trying them?"

"Yes. J-j-just to see that they were fresh and fit to eat. I'm a dab at that, you know. I can tell in a moment if things are fresh and—and I go about pip-pip-protecting people who want to eat stale things—"

"How dare you talk so impudently!"

"Oh, really!" gasped Bessie. "On—on second thoughts I'm sorry I ever



THE BULLY! "Apparently you don't know who I am!" he cried pompously. "Move your trumpery caravan out of the way!"

Bessie made a fresh assault on the cream-buns, which had already suffered more heavily than anything.

"Martha, just look! Look at that!" The startled, shouting cry nearly caused Bessie to swallow the bun whole. She looked up, and her eyes goggled. Four people had come upon the scene, but none of them were her chums!

"Bless my soul!" a woman cried. "It is a great fat girl, eating our picnic supper! George, just look at the impudent little hussy!"

"Oh dear!" gasped Bessie Bunter, and, making a frantic effort to rise, she overturned the lemonade decanter across the sandwiches. "I—I—I dud-dud-didn't know—"

Bessie broke off as she looked at the nearest figure—a man. She had seen that red, domineering face before. He was the same man who had driven the car, who had tried to overcharge them in his shop! She had come to the wrong picnic!

"Look at that lemonade!" came a wail of anguish from the woman.

Bessie did not feel like looking at anything just then.

"What does this mean, eh? What is

came near your horrid old picnic if you take it like this."

"You shall be sorrier!"

"Rather—that is, I couldn't be sorrier," said Bessie. "I wouldn't have touched anything if I knew that it belonged to a horrid old road hog—"

"Wha-a-a-at?"

"I—I m-m-mean, I'm going to leave you, after you've been so horridly suspicious!" stammered Bessie. "I'm going to cut you dead after this and—and not say a word to you if we meet—"

"You will stand there!" thundered the disappointed feaster.

"Sis-sis-stand here?" gasped Bessie.

"Yes! Until we have finished our supper! Then I shall take you back to your companions and have satisfaction for this insult."

"I—I'd really rather say nun-nun—nothing more about it," said Bessie anxiously.

"Stand there!"

"But I—I've changed my mind and decided to fuf-fuf-forgive you—"

"Not another word! You will stand and watch us until I am ready to take you

THE SCHOOL FRIEND.—No. 165.

back! Now, Martha, if there is anything left we will begin."

Bessie Banter stood, first on one leg, and then on the other. She looked desperately around for some means of escape. Bessie had never wished more heartily than she wished at that moment that she was a swift and speedy runner. Unfortunately, Bessie was not built that way at all. She realised that she was in a tight corner—one of the tightest corners that she had been in for some time!

The New "Squire!"

"BESSIE must have lost herself!" said Barbara Redfern.

"Must!" agreed Mabel Lynn, nodding her head. "It's most unlike her to miss any outing. As for a supper picnic—well, I can't understand it at all. Are you sure she started on ahead of us?"

"I certainly guessed she had," said Babs, looking genuinely worried. "We waited when we found she wasn't there. I do hope there's nothing the matter with her. It's so unlike Bessie not to get to a picnic somehow or other!"

That was perfectly true, and it was worrying all the girls who walked back from Miss Chantrey's pleasant little bungalow.

"Here are some people!" said Babs suddenly, as they walked along the road. "They're villagers, I expect. We can ask them if they've seen Bessie straying about by herself."

It was easy to describe Bessie, but the good-natured villagers stared at the description and shook their heads gravely. "Indeed, we've seen no girl like that, young ladies," said one. "She hasn't been in the village to our knowledge."

Babs hurried on along the lane, after thanking them.

"There's only one hope, Mabs," she said. "Bessie may have hidden herself in camp and gone to sleep. That's the best thing we can expect. There's the meadow, I believe."

They caught sight of the bright caravans through the trees and hurried to open the gate and pass into the meadow. Quickly and methodically Bessie's study-mates at Cliff House school searched for their fat and absent chum in caravans and tents alike. Needless to say, they were doomed to disappointment.

The others were coming in to the meadow when they gave up the hunt.

"No sign of her?" asked Clara Trevlyn, looking quite anxious.

"None at all," said Babs.

There was an uncomfortable silence. For Bessie not even to be in the camp sleeping was as alarming as it was unusual.

"Good evening, young ladies," said a voice, in a rich country dialect. "I see ye are newcomers here."

They turned to see an oldish lady who leaned upon the gate. Her voice, and the kindly, placid expression on her face, made them feel instantly that she was a friend.

"Yes—we are intending to stay a few days," Aunt Gladys returned instantly. "At present we are rather worried. One of our number—a rather plump girl, wearing glasses—is missing."

"Deary me—I'll mention it to everyone I see as I go back through the village," promised the country-woman. "I live in the Gable House, 'tis called. Maybe ye saw it as ye entered?"

"A lovely little house!" said Marjorie Hazeldene enthusiastically.

"Aye, lovely to look at; but little comfort these last few weeks," said the old lady, shaking her head. "Tis hard the

new owner of Keighley Hall has been to Granny—as I'm called here—since he has been in possession. But ye are strangers here—ye will now know that Sunmold is not the happy-place it was. Maybe ye were expecting to see our pageant?"

"Why, we've heard you have one every year—yes!" said Aunt Gladys.

"Shall we be in time for it?"

"There will be no pageant, this year," sighed the old dame, shaking her head.

"No pageant? And how is that?" said the girls together.

"Tis the doing of the new Squire—leastwise, he calls hisself Squire, though none of us will say it," said "Granny."

"Sunmold has had to take to new ways. Sixty years, girl and woman, I've taken my part in the pageant, with never a break. 'Twere hard sometimes to carry on when all the brave lads were out at the wars, but Old Squire—he were just kindness itself, and never nothing too much bother. And I says it's a shame as he's had to leave, and unjust, too, and I don't care if this popped-up Mister Newall hears me say it."

Her anger was so sincere, and so earnest, that they pressed her to give details. Granny gave them, and seldom had the girls listened to a more moving story than the one they heard from the lips of the old villager.

It was a month since the Squire had left the village—"hounded out," the simple old lady said. He had always been kindness itself to them. There was no one in the village who had anything but love for old Squire Newall.

But a claimant to his estate had appeared—a claimant to all his lands and title.

"Claimed it in a court o' law, he has," the old lady said, shaking her head. "Old squire had no way of proving as Mister Newall told falsehoods, though all of us is mortal sure as he did. Out he has gone, and this Mister Newall come in. You're on his land now, and maybe he charged a pretty price for it. But don't tell me; I don't ask for curiosity."

Yet it confirmed an impression in Aunt Gladys' mind. The week's hire of the meadow had only been secured at an unusually high advertised figure.

"Money—tis all this Mr. Newall wants," granny went on in a mournful tone. "Every penny he'll have out of us because we won't give him the respect he asks. Why, every shop in the village he has bought over the heads of them that had them, so that he can charge us every penny he can get."

"All the shops?" gasped Aunt Gladys.

"Then—then we have met—"

"Yes, aunt—the red-faced, bullying man!" gasped Babs. "He is the one who passed us in the car."

"No wonder he said he knew who we were—when it is his land we have rented!" chimed in Mabel Lynn.

"You have met him already?" said granny. "Ay, a little like a gentleman, I'll be prepared to say, you've found him to be. 'Tis Mr. Newall that owns the shops and bullies the poor men that used to own them—either sell at his wicked prices, or clear out!"

"Why don't they clear out?" asked Babs, in wonder.

Granny lowered her voice.

"Because we hope—we are all hoping," she said softly. "This law—everyone says 'tis an ass that wants well beating! 'Tis not natural-like for old squire and all his forbears to have lived here all their lives, and this Mister Newall to come and turn them out."

"You think the squire can really prove his claim?" Babs cried out.

"Folk says he must!" nodded granny.

"Tis for that reason we put up with

the insults of this bullying upstart, hoping squire will come back to us. Not that old squire tells us a thing.

"Fortune changes," says he, with tears in his eyes, when he goes. 'I love ye all, and I leave ye sadly indeed. 'Treat he that comes after me as well as ye have treated me.'

"'Twas all he said. No word of complaint. But 'tis common knowledge he be up in Lunnon, trying to figure things out wi' these lawyer gentlemen."

"I wish him luck, too," breathed Babs.

"Our pageant—'Tis soon told, young ladies, why 'tis stopped," said granny.

"Every year old squire used to throw open his grounds for the pageant to take place before Keighley Hall. 'None o' that with me unless you pays for it!' Mister Newall shouted at us this year. 'Ye lazy lot of artful scamps! I know's the piles o' money ye've made out of it, wi' letting ye rooms to visitors and sightseers.' From that he won't budge; and so the pageant is impossible."

"But couldn't it take place somewhere else?" Babs asked.

"There's none that has the heart to try and get it up, wi' Mister Newall so set agens it, my dear child. And old squire, he used to do all the figuring-out work, and getting down the costumes from Lunnon town, and helping us with it. 'Twill be bad for those as likes to let a few rooms, and worse for those who've never known the pageant missed. But Mister Newall only wants the money; and when we won't pay him—why, 'Teach 'em a lesson!' he says. 'I'll larn 'em to disobey me!' That's what he's done wi' the Gable House."

"How?" said Aunt Gladys, horrified to hear what a stir this newcomer had caused in the peaceful village.

"In old squire's time there were some as gave a trifle to be shown over the Gable House, where I live," said granny, shaking her head. "'Twas to be a privilege for me while I lived, seeing I'm old and my man long since gone. But the Gable House stand's on squire's land; and now I must charge for all as sees it and give the money to Mister Newall. All of us has been hit." She sighed, and a smile of sweet resignation came to her aged face. "But I'll stop talking too long. I see your friend has not yet come back. I will tell all in the village that she is away, and ask if any have seen her."

As she spoke the old lady dropped them a graceful curtsy and turned away. So wrapped up in her story had they been that it was only then that they realised how many more minutes had passed, with Bessie still absent.

"We must hunt for her ourselves, girls," Babs exclaimed, all her anxiety returning. "Goodness only knows where she can have gone all this time. I do hope she hasn't fallen down and hurt herself, or anything like that!"

"Help!" It was a distant and reedy shriek that caused the girls to whirl instantly in the direction from which it had come.

"Bessie!" Babs gasped.

"And she's being chased! Someone is running after her!" Babs cried.

"It's Mr. Newall himself!"

From the distance came another dismal shout.

"Help! Help! Save me!"

It needed no leader to set the girls tearing down the meadow towards the ruffled and breathless figure of the running fat girl. They could see her burly pursuer—without doubt the man they had already twice encountered.

"What ever can have happened?" Babs gasped, as she raced along at the side of her chum Mabs.

(Continued on page 297.)

THE CLIFF HOUSE WEEKLY

SPECIAL CARAVAN NUMBER

The Top Step,
No. 1 Caravan,
In a Field,
Beside A Road.

MY DEAR READERS,—Here we are at last on our holiday, and my Editorial Den is bounded by the blue sky above and trees about fifty yards away, so I can't really grumble that I haven't "space to think." We have taken an "off" morning to compile the contents of this week's "Weekly," as we leave Sunnold to-morrow morning—"with the lark," Peggy says. Personally, I don't think we shall do that unless there happens to be a lark ascending about 11 a.m.

Some of you may have tried the caravan type of holiday; and, if you have, you'll already have discovered what fun it is. We're only just making the discovery, and wondering why we never did it before. It's great—really it is! We thought camping was jolly good sport, but this is far better, because we can simply go where we like, when we like, and how we like. We see fresh sights after every day's travel, and I'm sure there's all the fun of camping in it.

If you'd seen Dolly Jobling yesterday when she got inside our little tent and pulled it down on herself, you'd agree with me about that, I'm quite sure!

A caravan, of course, is what you make it. We've all discovered that, Bessie Bunter, for instance, would like to make ours a restaurant, and almost every other girl would make it something else.

Marjorie, who is our fine naturalist, started to fill No. 2 caravan with all sorts of interesting "natural history" specimens that she discovered along the road—nests, ferns, flowers, and the like.

It might have been a pretty scheme if it had worked, but it didn't. Dolly Jobling put her stockings foot on a particularly prickly subject and yelled. Clara somehow managed to tip a bird's nest into the coffee she was making over the stove. As the nest had largely been constructed out of mud it didn't make the coffee any better. There were other disasters, and in the end Marjorie decided that

the collection would have to go. She's still being chipped about it, of course. Any funny old things we find we always offer to her in case she wants to collect something else. Only yesterday Freda Foote sailed up to her with a collection of old tin cans, and said how pretty they'd look in No. 7 study when we get back.

Have just been into the caravan to have a nice iced lemonade. Note carefully the words I use: I went in to have it. Please do not assume that I had it. I had forgotten that Bessie was inside the caravan. She says that she's only had one or two drinks, and its the hot weather that's made the lemonade evaporate. I suppose I may just as well believe that as anything else.

Flap Derwent, as you may guess, is in her element with two horses to look after. One of them is her own mare, Jenny, and Flap is taking great care to see that she is well-fed and not overworked. Several of us who can ride at all have had little canter on her and thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. Clara thinks it would be a good idea next year for all of us to be mounted, and sweep through the country like a "giddy cavalcade." Bessie, for one, would soon supply the giddy part of it, I know.

The ink that I am writing with is getting simply appalling—it looks weaker with every word I write. Ah, I know! I remember hearing a little tinkling sound this morning. Dolly Jobling, you clumsybus! Come and answer to your transgressions! Did you, or did you not, kick the ink bottle over this morning? You did? Then why the dickens did you fill it up with water as though nothing had happened, instead of going and getting a fresh bottle?

Clara's now advising me to pour what is left down the back of Dolly's neck, and I really feel like taking her advice. I'll go and roll her in the grass, anyway! Please pardon me from writing any more until next week, and I'll set about it at once.

Your sincere friend,
BARBARA REDFERN.

ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE TOUR.

Chief Drivers.—Aunt Gladys and Philippa Derwent.
Pusher on Hills (sometimes).—Bessie Bunter.

Only two girls, besides the driver, are allowed to ride at one time. On hills everyone walks. Four sleep in each caravan at night, and four in the little tent, unless it is extra cold.

The tour is to last for twenty-eight days, and it is intended to cover about three hundred miles at the outside. This may be reduced to two hundred if long stays are made anywhere.

Relief Drivers.—Mabel Lynn and Phyllis Howell.
Head Cook (always).—Bessie Bunter.

No. 1 Caravan.

Mrs. GLADYS REDFERN,
BARBARA REDFERN,
Captain.
MABEL LYNN.
BESSIE BUNTER.
FREDA FOOTE.
PEGGY PRESTON

No. 2 Caravan.

MARJORIE HAZELDENE,
Captain.
CLARA TREVLYN.
DOLLY JOBLING.
PHILIPPA DERWENT.
PHYLLIS HOWELL.
AUGUSTA ANSTRUTHER-BROWNE



No. 16
(New Series).

Week Ending
July 15th, 1922



Which is Top Caravan?

No. 1.
By Barbara Redfern.

TOP? Which? What? Why, as though there could be any question about it! Ask anyone in No. 1 Caravan, and they'll tell you immediately.

For one thing, the caravan itself is, I am sure, far better than poor old No. 2. It doesn't bump into half so many holes in the road as the other one does. Marjorie was complaining, after her first ride in the caravan, that she was black and blue all over. None of us were like that. Bessie, I'll admit, may have been black in places—but not from bruises!

Then take tidiness. If you go into No. 2 caravan you'll always be certain to find a glorious heap of things, with Dolly somewhere in the middle of them searching for something she's dropped. In Clara's hat I've discovered two or three stale buns, and a sandwich that had got somehow mislaid was found under Marjorie's pillow. You never make discoveries like that in No. 1 caravan. Bessie is so frightfully tidy in putting things like food "out of the way."

Early rising? Well, we've got them beaten hollow in that! Do you know that the other morning we were all awake and stirring before five o'clock? I'll admit that it was because Freda Foote set the alarm clock wrongly, and it went off at that time.

Our meals, of course, are always first, and they're always jolly well cooked. Two or three days ago No. 2 made a stew, and when they came to serve it out there were two buttons in it. Everyone had had a hand in making it, and Clara wrathfully demanded whose buttons they were. No one would claim them. Curiously enough, I afterwards saw Clara pocket them—but I don't imply by that that they were hers.

Wait until we get an opportunity of getting up a real six-a-side cricket match, and then we'll prove who is Top Caravan!

No. 2.
By Marjorie Hazeldene.

I ASKED the question of Clara, Dolly, Flap, Phyllis, and Augusta, and they all immediately answered: "No. 2." As it is my own opinion, I don't think there's much doubt about it.

If you doubt it, just glance at the shabby vehicle that precedes us along the road. Just think of the number of it—"No. 1." It might be the first one made, and the people in it the first who ever went out in a caravan. If you had seen it after Bessie Butler's great washing day—of which, I am glad to say, we have a snap—you would certainly have thought so.

Of course they boast about the promptitude with which their meals are served, but we (ah-m!) are not so greedy that we cannot afford to wait a little while. I'll admit that we did show a certain amount of agitation on the day that Dolly Jobling announced: "There's something in this broth, and I can't tell whether it's the mutton bone or a celluloid soap case," but as it proved to be the bone, all was well.

Regarding our horse there can be no possible argument. Jenny, Flap Derwent's own possession, pulls our van. Jenny is infinitely faster and fresher than Tim (whom Phyllis calls Tired Tim) fastened in the shafts of No. 1.

They call us untidy, but that is libellous. I admit that I, myself, have complained once or twice about a certain air of confusion that prevails in the van, but Clara quickly pointed out my error. I deeply regret having to use her words, but as they so completely took the force out of my argument, I must repeat them. "Marjorie," she said, "you're a giddy old fusser! Look in that caravan—doesn't it look like the pictureque, jolly old vagrant's home to the giddy life? Just what we want on a holiday—free-and-giddy-easy!"

Yes, without doubt, we are Top Caravan!



CHUMMINESS

The Secret of our Success!

By Peggy Preston.



I SUPPOSE it's being always together, whether it rains or shines, sharing common misfortunes and happiness, sorrow or joy, that makes such a holiday as ours the jolly thing it is.

The chumminess of it all has struck me so forcibly that I feel that I must write about it. I can't put into words exactly what I feel—that happy, care-free way you wake in the morning, the jollity you see in everything; but I'm sure you'll understand what I mean. We really are just a crowd of good friends.

You will find, on this page, two articles on the respective merits of Nos. 1 and 2 Caravans. Each is what is called a "leg pull." If you had seen the rival captains exchange articles after they had written them, and heard the laughing remarks, you would realise what a really chummy spirit there is in our camp.

Walking along the roads when we are moving from one place to another, how queer are the things on which we start to talk when we have exhausted all the latest catch phrases, and Freda Foote has worked off all her jokes. Two or three days ago I was strolling along with Bessie Butler, and she talked in a serious manner that at first quite startled me.

She was really planning what she was going to be when she is grown up! "Do you think I'd be all right as a lady doctor, Peggy?" she said. And when I turned that idea down, she made other suggestions. At first I thought that she was just joking with me, but I soon found out that Bessie was in dead earnest. Somehow, one doesn't usually think of Bessie as being just anything but careless and happy-go-lucky.

Chumminess is a fine thing; and all those who have the opportunity of a holiday like ours will be well advised to take it!



RULES OF THE GAME OF CARAVANNING!

By Phyllis Howell

THE game can be played by any number of girls, and consists of starting from one goal and endeavouring to reach another. Any number of caravans are allowed, and any number of horses, but it is desirable to have at least one animal for each van, as they are difficult to push up-hill. We have a team of eleven girls, with an umpire, and have so far got along splendidly—especially down-hill.

These are some of the most important terms and definitions:

PENALTY KICK is awarded by the horse to anyone who annoys it and stands too near.

A FOWL takes place when we ask ourselves the old riddle: "Why does the chicken cross the road?"

You can get a **DFCK** in the village pond, but it is better to buy one from a regular dealer.

VAN IN usually means that all hands are needed to push the van out of soft ground.

A DOUBLE is Bessie's dinner-time helping of pudding.

ROLLING THE PITCH is not a term used in the game; usually it is **PITCHING THE ROLL**, and is performed by Clara at breakfast.

You can be **HUFFED** if you take offence quickly.

A NEW BOWLER IS PUT ON, as a rule, if a gentleman's hat blows under the wheels of your van.

INSIDE-RIGHT is everyone's position during a rainstorm.

THE SCHOOL FRIEND.—No. 166.



JILL OF ALL TRADES!

By Augusta Anstruther-Browne.

I AT least am not likely to forget this holiday, for a most remarkable thing has been discovered about me. I was certainly ignorant of it myself, and am still entertaining strong doubts about the matter, but the others have none. I think I have to thank Babs for having been made the "handywoman" of the party.

If there's anything to be done now they come to me; that's what it has resolved itself into. I've cut Clara out completely. Dolly Jobling has just brought me a badly battered tin and a tin-opener, with the bland question: "I say, Augusta! Do open this! You've got such a knack of doing things!" Yesterday she wanted me to stop up a leaking kettle-spout "with a bit of something." Before that she brought me no fewer than three shoes, collected from various people, with the request that I'd "Just knock those nails down, if I didn't mind!"

As for Freda Foote—well, Freda's having the time of her life at my expense. Yesterday Bessie was nearly late for tea. Freda whispered to her afterwards, and Bessie came trotting to me to know if I'd just mind "looking at her watch and doing something to it" as it kept on stopping, and it would be a jolly serious thing if she really did miss a meal. I looked at the watch, and said that the best thing I thought I could do to it would be to put it on the ground and hammer it out of shape with a big stone—which didn't please Bessie at all!

As far as I can see, I'm going to be in for it now!



A LETTER TO UNCLE GERALD!

By Philippa Derwent.

DEAR Uncle Gerald and Aunt Marian,—Was delighted to get your letter, and to know that everything in South America has turned out so satisfactorily.

"You will, no doubt, be surprised to know that we are on a caravan tour. I am spending the happiest time imaginable. Jenny, my mare, is with us, and none of us can thank you enough for such a topping gift. She was rather lazy when we started, but she is now in splendid form. Several of us have had canthers on her and enjoyed it very much.

"You'd have been very amused the other day. Bessie said that she'd help me groom the horses, and came armed with Barbara's scented soap, Clara's face flannel, Marjorie's sponge, and Dolly Jobling's nail-brush. There was such a rumpus that I'm afraid poor old Bessie forgot all about her 'grooming,' and left me to it.

"I believe Aunt Marian noticed once that Dolly (who's with us) is a bit clumsy at times. She excelled herself the other evening. Coming back to the caravans when it had grown dark, she failed to see Jenny lying down, and fell right over her. You never heard such a shriek in your life! Fortunately, Dolly didn't hurt herself; if there is one thing which she can do really skillfully, it's falling!

"Everyone sends their love to Chick and Jill, and we all hope that they are fit and in the best of health. We're all looking forward to your promised visit.

"With fondest love, I remain,

"Your very affectionate niece,

"FLAP."



"D'YE KEN OUR VANS?"

(After "John Peel.")

By Mabel Lynn.

D'ye ken our vans with their coats so gay?
D'ye ken our vans at the break of day?
D'ye ken that noise? Bessie's snoring away
When it's time to get up in the morning!

D'ye ken our vans? They're a cheerful pair.
D'ye ken the sounds that fill the air?
With little short shrieks Dolly combs her hair
When it's time to get up in the morning!

D'ye ken the door that opes with a crash?
D'ye ken a yell and a short word—"Dash!"?
And Clara regrets that she's quite so rash
When it's time to get up in the morning!

D'ye ken the fire that Freda'd raise?
D'ye ken much smoke and a tiny blaze?
It'll always choke Marj, if in bed she lays
When it's time to get up in the morning!

D'ye ken a cook who's a perfect trump?
D'ye ken she'll lie till they make her jump?
Then Bessie comes out with a fearful bump
When it's time to get up in the morning!

D'ye ken the horses Flap will pet?
D'ye ken the feed they soon will get?
She's always there and they need not fret
When it's time to get up in the morning!

D'ye ken a cheerful, frizzling sound?
D'ye ken a crowd that gathers round?
The breakfast's cooked and we're gaily
gowned—
And that's the Caravan Camp in the morning!



THE ART OF KEEPING YOUNG!

By Aunt Gladys.

I DON'T suppose that I shall address many people of my own age with these notes; but if I do, let me give you the secret of keeping young! I can do so in four words: "Join our Caravan party!"

These have been some of my occupations during the last few days:

Climbing up on the wheel to unstop the chimney that some mischievous boys had stuffed up with grass.

Trying to beat Bessie Bunter—at ludo!
Playing rouders for an hour at a stretch.
Rescuing Dolly Jobling from the mid-st of a prickly hedge.

Attending to the lacerations of the said Dolly.

Scrubbing out the caravan while the girls were away (for which I was severely slated, as I probably deserved!).

Endeavouring to judge the appetites of eleven healthy and growing girls.

From this you will see that life is by no means dull for me. But I am thoroughly enjoying it! To tell the truth, I don't think I have ever enjoyed a holiday quite so much before. I seem to have forgotten all the cares of everyday life, and to have become a girl again. Of course, I have responsibilities, but I have two very capable "captains" in the caravans, and excellent assistance with the horses.

It has been suggested that I shall be asking Miss Primrose to allow me to enter the Fourth Form next term, but I don't think I shall grow quite as young as that!



ELEVEN GIRLS IN A CARAVAN!

By Clara Trevlyn

Eleven girls in a caravan—
Some parts as white as snow,
And everywhere that Dolly walks
She treads on someone's toe.

Ten girls in a caravan—
Some parts as black as soot,
And everything that happens is
A joke to Freda Foote.

Nine girls in a caravan—
And if our Babs and Mabs
Are not the two together, then
You'll find it's Mabs and Babs.

Seven girls in a caravan—
A struggling sight you see;
They ought to make a wider door
For poor old Bessie B.

Six girls in a caravan—
Augusta cooks an egg;
And though it's like a little brick
There's no complaint from Pegg!

Four girls in a caravan—
Marj, sits upon the floor,
And as it bumps at every yard,
Drops stitches by the score.

Three girls in a caravan—
As on the road it jogs,
And Flap and Phyllis talk and talk
Of horses, sport, and dogs.

One girl in a caravan—
You will not meet her lev' in
Whatever town you visit, for
It's noisy—?

WHO CAUSES MOST FUN?



Answer:
FREDA FOOTE.

By Dolly Jobling.

FANCY there being any question about it? Why, of course, Freda, our Caravan Jester, causes more fun than anyone. She's got stacks of new "book titles," and she's always punning or telling funny stories, or saying something about—me!

"Where's the caravan, Freda? I can't see it!" Bessie complained on one dark evening.

"Perhaps Dolly's pushed it over!" Freda answered. "She's always bumping into something!"

And on the very next morning, when Flap Derwent exclaimed:

"Whew! Where have the horses gone?"

"Ask Dolly if she's cooked them by mistake!" cries Freda.

On both occasions there was a laugh. Well, I contend that they were laughing at the queer things that Freda said—not laughing at me. I admit that I'm sometimes a little bit clumsy, but I don't think it's funny—often, as a matter of fact, it's rather tragic.

You see what I mean, of course? I don't mind being laughed at. I've had to stand quite enough of it at Cliff House not to be at all "thin-skinned." But I think I'm right in laying the blame on Freda as far as fun is concerned.

Here is Freda's latest contribution to an autograph album:

"Construct with care a booby trap,
Put sawdust, sand, and soot in it;
It will not work, for ten to one
D. J. will 'put her foot in it.'"

That raised plenty of laughter, but I maintain that it was because of the way Freda wrote her verse. As far as strict accuracy goes, Freda is quite wrong; on the occasion she had in mind I inadvertently put my head in it!

Reader, I leave you to decide!



Answer:
DOLLY JOBLING.

By Freda Foote.

GENTLE reader, let me tell you, with a sad face, and tears in my eyes—you'll know that I'm in earnest, or in the midst of peeling onions—that Dolly Jobling was going to leave the camp. Straightaway I went off and started to pack my own bag.

"For what for, please, is not it?" you will immediately ask, if you happen to be a Hottentot.

Gentle reader, let me explain. My position, without Dolly Jobling, would have been impossible! Some of you may not think seriously of what a terrible responsibility it is to be called the camp jester, expected to turn out jokes at the rate of forty miles an hour when the sun shines, and seventy when it rains! Unfortunately, I have to think that way, as the old gentleman said when the doctor told him to stand on his head for an hour a day.

The terrible fact would have become apparent to all the girls that I was a fraud—an impostor! They would have discovered that I was not a jester at all! Without Dolly I should have had no one to "gag" at, as the expression runs. I should have walked about with a sad and gloomy face, an outcast from the camp. For, you see, the simple truth is that I don't make jokes at all; I simply keep on telling them about Dolly Jobling!

Fancy asking such a question as the above—and asking me, of all people! I must be honest and tell the truth. Dolly causes all the fun, and I make capital out of it!

And now, having written this great confession, I am going to throw myself under the caravan—taking good care, first, that the horse is out, and the caravan is firmly fastened and cannot move!



Answer;
"I DO!"

Speshully Ritten
by
Bessie Bunter.

DEAR readers, I hate blowing my own trumpet, as you probably know, but Barberer has shown me the articals ritten by Freader and Dolley, and, dear readers, I feel I must rite this protest.

As I have freakqently said, I am the life and sole of the camp, and I am shure that without me they would have a very gloomie time indeed. I doant take a lot of credit for it, becoss I know that it is a sort of gift with me to have a humerous way of torking to cheer them up when they are fealing dispondent.

Take the uthter morning. I got up and fownd Dolley looking quite worried, and I sed: "Dolley, what ever is the matter?" She sed to me: "Bessie, I have just fallen over, and I sat on somewun's hat." I sed: "Ha, ha, ha! Never mind, Dolley; you have done the 'hat-trick'!" And Dolley larfed then like ennything, and said: "I am so glad that you can see the joak in it, Bessie!" and went away.

I think that I had a very good sence of humer indeed, becoss I found shortly afterwards that it was my hat she had sat on, and rooined it! Dolley was rather un-reasonable when I told her whose hat she had sat on, and kept on larfing; but she could not deny that I had cheered her up.

I think it is the stimmyulating air that has made me think of such a lot of joakes since we have been away, becoss I have invented all sorts of book titles that are a lot better than those silly ones that Freader trots out. Freader is rather jellus, though, and won't admit it!



OUR WAYSIDE WARDROBE.

By Marjorie Hazeldene.

"AND what shall we wear on the caravan trip?" Oh, the discussions there were over the clothes question, long, long weeks before the holidays started! Should we take jumpers? Would high or low heels be best for walking? And which were the most comfortable—boots, or shoes? And so on, for hours and hours.

WHAT WE ARE WEARING.

Of course, no large or unwieldy boxes were allowed. Two horses could not possibly draw the entire wardrobe of eleven girls! Mabs would have simply loved to take her fascinating gipsy costume. But for real caravanning it is quite unsuitable.

Of course, they belong mainly to the class known as "useful," but don't for a moment imagine they are ugly. Quite the contrary.

There's Augusta's striped, pleated skirt, and they are so fashionable just now! It is made with the stripes going round, a style which suits her tall and graceful form perfectly.

Poor Dolly Jobling!

She's been feverishly knitting a jumper for weeks past, but it has not appeared on the tour. Freda said she supposed it had "dropped off the earth," but, from what I know, it certainly had "dropped" repeatedly off the needles!

But Dolly received a ripping box of clothes, from home, so the ruined jumper was not quite the disaster that it might have been. And our clothes don't lack colour.

I'd just love you to see Babs' and Mabs' blazers. Bright red and blue stripes! They say they wear them to prevent themselves from being mislaid! You certainly can see them quite a mile off!

A turkey caught sight of the blazers the other day, and he approached the girls in quite a heated way. Of course, they were not frightened; but turkeys can be less pleasant than when gracing the Christmas dinner-table. However, Bessie unintentionally saved the situation. She was very flustered, and ran towards the turkey, instead of away. Seeing a mountain like Bessie bearing towards it, the turkey naturally took fright, and sought cover in its native field.

Clara selected our walking-shoes—brogues, with heels rubber tipped; most comfy for walking. Clara can choose comfort, if not style.

Augusta could not resist silk stockings! Consequently, the gnats bit her ankles. Since then she's adopted the fashion of the rest of us—thin woollen stockings, and a frequent paddle in a brook to cool our feet. Specially after a bit of hill-climbing.

WHAT BESSIE WEARS.

Bessie, as usual, has a "decided" style of her own. The whole of her outfit is in check pattern—large checks.

Peggy tactfully suggested to Bessie that lines made up "running down" would suit her style of figure better than checks.

Bessie did not agree with her. She said that she had enough lines "sitting down" during the school term, so she knew they wouldn't suit her on holidays!

A savoury smell tells me that Bessie has cooked a delightful supper, so if you'll kindly excuse me, I'll go and investigate.



HOW WE COULD IMPROVE THE TRIP!

A Number of Suggestions gathered together by Philippa Derwent.

BARBARA REDFERN.—I've only one suggestion. I think that if Dolly Jobling were chained down to the ground at meal-times there would be less casualties among our feet and ankles. Otherwise, I consider we're going on beautifully.

CLARA TREVLYN.—As Bessie is always complaining about the fog of walking along hot and dusty lanes, I think it would be a good idea to bring an elephant with us next time. Then we could just say, "Jumbo, pick her up in your trunk!" Wouldn't it be useful for getting her up in time to cook breakfast! That trunk would just come in through the door, and Bessie would be whisked out and set down right beside the fire, all ready to start!

DOLLY JOBLING.—I consider that more attention might be paid to the cookery arrangements on future tours. I admit Bessie is the only one who can cook anything worth eating. I've tried several times myself, and I never have any luck. And I meant to do such a lot of experimenting, too!

PHYLLIS HOWELL.—Caravans are very crowded things for wet evenings. These, fortunately, have been few and far between, but if the vans were the size of furniture-vans we could have ping-pong sets, quoits, and all sorts of jolly things!

AUGUSTA ANSTRUTHER-BROWNE.—Next time we come I think we'd better have less things that are certain to "go wrong." To-day I've been called on to repair a patent tin-opener, a collapsible cooking pot that collapsed when it shouldn't, the hinge on the chimney, and the toasting-fork!

PEGGY PRESTON.—Some softer pillows would be welcomed. My own is composed of sundry articles of clothing, the paste-board, four magazines, and three books. One of them is that well-known classic "Hard Times"—and it lets you have them! It's hard at all times!

AUNT GLADYS.—I really would like to see a travelling provision wagon with the party. Since Clara upset Marjorie's work-basket in the tea-caddy, and Dolly put the salt and sugar in together, I've had to be perpetually on the watch.

FREDA FOOTE.—We each ought to have a caravan to ourselves next time. There would be some fun in christening them, I'm sure. Dolly could call hers "The Travelling Rumpus," Clara's "The Giddy Bus," Marjorie's "The Collector's Retreat," and Bessie Bunter's "The Strength Raiser!"

MARJORIE HAZELDENE.—Our next caravans ought to be entirely stuck together without the use of a nail or screw of any sort, and, instead of having tin implements, we ought to have rubber, or something guaranteed never to make a sharp edge. There seems to be nails and things everywhere!

BESSIE BUNTER.—The only serious complaint I have to make is that you girls don't realise how much grub a growing girl needs when she's always tramping along the roads like a gipsy. I've drawn up plans for an ideal caravan—a third one, you know—specially devoted to the grub. I shall insist on it next year.



TO THE RETURNING SKWIRE OF SUNMOULD!

The Wonderful "Speech of Welcome" that Bessie Bunter prepared but never delivered. From Her Notes.

SIR, Eskwire, Skwire of Sunmould, dear Sir,

I have been choosen on account of being an infoenshal sort of girl to bid you make a glad and happy return to your deer villidge of Sunmould. I expect that wile you have been away you have orten had teers of sorrow in your eyes, and now we have got teers of gladness in our eyes to see you coming home like a konkering hearo. (Applorse. Wait until they have finished claping.)

Skwire of Sunmould in the words of the poet I say "Fling open the bewtiful gates and come in!" There are no gates, but that is my poetical lisenze. (Larfter.) Sir, we are very glad to see you coming, and if I may mension a little matter, it is that we shall all be very pleased if you have a bankwit to celebrate this homecoming, becous that is the niseest way to do it. (Hear, hear!)

Sir Skwire, some people go away from their homes becous they have to, or becous they havent pade the rent, and some go away becous the clay soil gives them roomaizem, and some go becous the people are

jellus of them—espeshully if they have a fine figger like mine and evveryone envies them. Sir, you did not do becous of any of these reasons, to the best of my nollidge.

We all know why you went, Sir. Yes, indeed we do, doan't we, People? (Cries of "Rarther!" and "Well dun!") You went away from the mist of all these people, Sir, becous you were forced to go, and there was nothing else for it—a very heroick moatiff. (Applorse.) You went becous of an impostor, Sir. (Further applorse.) I have ritten a speshul poem about the ockayshon. (Shouts: "Reed it! We should love to heer your poem, Miss Bunter.")

Skwire of Sunmould, Sir, this is my poem, ritten with a full hart and (here I smile) a peece of pensel. (Larfter.)

Dear Sir, you have been forced to go away Becous of a wickid impostor. You went away and thort: "Oh, my deer villidge!

Now I have gone and lost her!"

But imposters get fownd out in time, Sir, Oh, yes, indeed they do! They fownd out about Mr. Newall, And now he's got to roo!

I am not a bit sorry he's going, Becos he was suspishus and greedy; He took the bread and butter out of the peres Of the pore and neady.

But now you've come back and I feel so proud

I'd like to put you on the steaple; Come gather rownd, and give three cheers, Three cheers, my dear and luving people.

(Wait until the cheering and applorse has died down agane.)

Dear Sir, Skwire of Sunmould, that is quite an original poem ritten for the ockayshon. I felt that this was such a suspishus ockayshon that I was stired to the depths of my heart, and that is why I have ritten it.

Sir, I will not now keep you for many more minnits. Before I declare the road free for you to come through, I wish to thank everyone, including all my chums, for the assistance they have given me in getting up the padgent this year. I am rarther good at histery, and it wassent a very diffcult matter for me to suggest a lot of the things in it, and there would have been a lot more events if Barberer and some of the others haddent sed they were impossable.

I now have grate plesher in declaring the villidge open to you, Sir, and welcome, too. I would just like to take this last opportunity of saying how much I am shure all the simple villidgers would enjoy a bankwet if you were thinking of getting one up. I now have the honner to be, Sir, your obedient Servent, Bessie Bunter.

Men and women, lads and lasses, three cheers for the Skwire of Sunmould. (Loud and prolonged applorse.)

The Schoolgirl Caravanners!

(Continued from page 292.)

Bessie Bunter came bouncing across the plank bridge over the stream with none of her former timidity, rushed to get behind her chums, and stood there, breathless and trembling.

Mr. Newall himself crossed the bridge and pulled up at the sight of the girls.

"You haven't got away from me, you little pilferer!" he exclaimed wrathfully.

Aunt Gladys stepped forward in her most dignified manner.

"Before you say such things to Bessie, perhaps you will have the goodness to explain to me!" she said icily.

"Explain?" puffed the angry man. "Yes, I'll explain to you all right! That fat little minx has been stealing my food. That's what I mean!"

"I—I dud-dud-didn't, Aunt Gladys!" quavered Bessie, from her "retreat." "I—I've promised to pay it all back when my remittance comes, too! I—I j-jolly well thought it was Miss Chantrey's picnic I'd found!"

"Stuff and nonsense!" was the hot retort. "If we hadn't come along at that moment you'd have cleared off, and I'd never have known who it was. Why, you tried to run away when I was bringing you back here. That's why I've had to run all the way, too! Arguing in my shop about prices, and then taking my food—why, it's a conspiracy!"

Babs & Co. might have spoken quite as hotly as Mr. Newall, but Aunt Gladys endeavoured to interpose with all her customary tact. She had to show great restraint in getting the stories of both sides, but it was done at last.

Blundering and confused though Bessie's story was, it left no doubt that she had got into the scrape quite accidentally, and had been full of "good intentions."

"I see that the whole matter is a mistake, Mr. Newall," said Aunt Gladys smoothly. "You may send your bill in to me, and I will see that you are compensated. I think that will settle the matter."

"I'll have an apology, too!" cried the other.

Aunt Gladys fired up at that.

"Indeed, you will not, when there is no call for it!" she said. "You have acted quite wrongly in detaining Bessie, and causing her such alarm. I think the matter will be finished with when your bill is paid."

"And I'll see it is, too!" ground out Mr. Newall.

Aunt Gladys coughed. Something else that had been in her mind had added to her restraint. It was a difficult time to broach such a subject, but Aunt Gladys was nothing if not courageous.

"Mr. Newall," she said quietly. "You will excuse me, I hope, in speaking about another matter. We are strangers here, and very disappointed to hear that there is to be no pageant."

"Pageant!" he said; and his eyes flashed.

"Yes," went on Aunt Gladys calmly. "It seems such a pity that an old custom should be dropped. The pros and cons of the matter do not concern us at all. Surely I can appeal to you, as a lover of this beautiful little village, to reconsider—"

"I'm reconsidering nothing!" cut in Mr. Newall abruptly. "I suppose you've been listening to the old village gossips. They've had my price, and if they don't pay it, there's no pageant!"

"But if I may say it, Mr. Newall," said Aunt Gladys, in a pleading tone,

"that is surely rather hard! These pageants have many effects, and mean much to those who love the place. Strangers though we are, we can all understand—"

"You're here to understand nothing!" cried Mr. Newall arrogantly. "You've hired this land from me—that's business, and that's as far as I'm concerned! So's the pageant—that's business, too! I've seen enough of you people already! Let me warn you not to come poking your noses into something that doesn't concern you! There's going to be no pageant this year; and that's final! If you mind your own business and I mind mine, we'll get on best! That's all I've got to say!"

And Mr. Newall, who called himself the new "Squire" of Sunmold, turned and stamped away, leaving the girls staring.

Threatening!

"H E'S a bully!"

Mr. Newall, and the ways of Mr. Newall, were being discussed over the cheerful breakfast at the Cliff House caravanners had in their meadow on the following morning.

"I think he's a beast!" said Bessie Bunter wrathfully. "I told him so to his face, only I think he—he's a bit deaf. Kept me waiting there for hours and hours—"

"Well, you really were rather careless, you know, Bessie," said Babs mildly. "If you'd listened, you'd have known that Miss Chantrey's bungalow is right in the other direction."

"Think I'd have gone and eaten his horrid old grub if I'd known who it belonged to?" asked Bessie Bunter indignantly. "That's what I jolly well told him, only he wouldn't believe me. And what do you think he called me?"

"Gertrude?" said Freda Foote somewhat flippantly.

"No! He—he called me fat!"

"Then he does speak the truth sometimes!" observed Clara.

"Oh, really!"

"But that's beside the point," Clara went on. "We've come here to find a regular giddy old rumpus in progress, and I feel that I want to join in that rumpus!"

"It doesn't seem fair to me that a man like that should be able to stop the village pageant," said Barbara Redfern indignantly.

"The villagers have lost heart—apparently they have no leader," said Aunt Gladys. "Perhaps they have found that Mr. Newall is very hard on a leader—a man of his character could very well wound such a leader out of the village."

Babs gave an exclamation of sudden excitement.

"My word! Aunt Gladys, there's no reason why they shouldn't have a pageant, is there?"

"No reason at all," said Aunt Gladys. "Except that it doesn't fit in with Mr. Newall's idea that he should have a share of all the money made in the village."

"Then," said Babs, "supposing we take a hand!"

"How, Babs? What do you mean?"

Babs laughed excitedly.

"Why, easily! It seems that the people are being bullied, and everyone is afraid to take on the position of leader. We've had a lot of experience in producing things ourselves. If we could only help them it might make heaps of difference!"

There was an excited and supporting chorus of voices.

"Just the very idea! It's a topping wheeze, Babs!"

Aunt Gladys was almost as eager as

the girls. Perhaps she saw the whole position from a broader point of view, but undoubtedly they were right.

"Supposing we go and see Mrs. Forbes—that's Granny—at once?" she suggested. "We can at least find out how far things have gone, and whether it is still possible for anything to be done."

"Rather!"

Granny received them at the door of the picturesque Gable House with every evidence of joy, and her wrinkled face lit up when they explained what made them such early callers.

"Why, come in to my parlour to—"

she started to say, then broke off. "I'm sorry, young ladies! I was forgetting that my little house stands on Mr. Newall's ground. I mustn't allow anyone in here unless they take one of these threepenny tickets—I should be cleared right out if I did."

"Then we certainly won't come in, thanks!" said Babs, with a grim smile. "I don't think any of us want to pay threepences to Mr. Newall. Can't we go somewhere else for a chat?"

"Why, certainly!" said Granny, taking down her picturesque bonnet. "In the smithy, to be sure. Mr. Anvel is the very one for us to talk to. He would have organised the pageant himself if we had not told him how bad it might be for him to go against the squire's wishes."

They found the village blacksmith a fine, burly, open-hearted figure; looking, as Marjorie expressed it, "just as though he had stepped out of a poem." He heard what they had to say, and hurried off immediately to summon acquaintances. Along came the timid little ex-proprietor of the grocery store, and the butcher, the tanner, and the wheelwright. Within five minutes a regular meeting was in progress—and the excitement of it proved that Mr. Newall had not yet killed the spirit of Sunmold.

"Old squire—he'd be heart-broke to think we'd given up the pageant for this year!" the smith observed, in a deep, ponderous voice. "Ay, but for the pleading of you good folk I'd have gone on w' it—"

"'Twould have been you for a move somewhere else—smithy stands on squire's land, like everything else," sighed the little grocer. "But with these young ladies to get the pageant up—why, what can Mr. Newall say to anyone if we don't ask to use his grounds?"

"He can't turn everyone out of the village!" guffawed the smith, with that loud, honest laughter that is music to hear.

And the girls knew, by then, that the pageant was going to take place, after all!

Quickly and eagerly they pressed for details. On account of local conditions—the harvest, the customary date that people expected it, and other things—it would have to be staged within four or five days. That meant a lot of work, but none of them minded that; on the contrary, it would provide a very pleasant pastime.

"We must meet you all again as soon as we have talked matters out," Aunt Gladys declared at last. "The pageant shall certainly be as good as ever if it is in our power to make it so!"

They modestly tried to decline the grateful thanks of the villagers that were showered on them at parting. There was, as a matter of fact, little to choose between the excitement of any of them. Bessie Bunter was simply beaming with delight.

"Jolly good thing you've got me with you, eh?" she asked them all in turn. "Being so good-looking, and having such a fine figure, I can take the principal part in the pageant—eh? Don't you think I shall look fine walking along beside the blacksmith? I expect they'll put our photos in the paper, and call it 'Force and a Fine Figure.'"

"Force and Fatty!" suggested Freda Foote.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's jealousy; I don't like to see it on a holiday!" said Bessie severely. "You wait until you see me dressed up as Julius Cæsar—"

"But what has he got to do with the pageant?" cried Babs, laughing.

"I—I expect he came and conquered this place—he did most!" said Bessie vaguely. "Still, I'll be Oliver Cranmer if you like, or—or—"

"Guy Fawkes!" said Freda.

"Oh, really!"

"There will be plenty of time to decide all those details, girls," laughed Aunt Gladys. "We must only take the smaller parts ourselves, of course, as it is a village pageant. As soon as we get back—"

Woof, woof, woof!

"Oh, go away, you horrid dogs! Go away, you beasts!" cried a shrill, childish voice.

The baying of dogs, followed so swiftly by that cry, seemed to cause an electric silence amongst the girls.

"Came from over there!" Babs muttered.

"Go away—go away!" the voice cried again.

"It is!" Babs gasped. "Wonder what ever can be the matter?"

With one accord they turned down a side-lane, and went running in the direction from which the cries had come. As soon as they turned a corner they saw the cause. A pretty, curly-haired little boy, dressed in a blue velvet suit, stood on top of a pile of stones at the roadside. Three big, powerful-looking dogs were prancing around him.

"Off, you beasts—off!" cried Flap Derwent.

She was the first to reach the spot—first to make the animals heed. They said there was something magnetic about Flap when it came to dealing with animals. The three creatures turned almost at once, and slunk away with their tails between their legs.

"Those—those horrid dogs—they're always after me!" said the little boy, struggling bravely to keep from tears. "I—I'm always afraid they'll bite me!"

"Whose dogs are they?" Flap asked, watching the animals lope along the lane.

"They belong to Mr. Newall," said the little boy.

"Mr. Newall! The very name caused a fresh anger to rise in the hearts of the girls. Even in his choice of pets the blustering bully of the village seemed to be aggressive.

"We'll take you back as far as the village, youngster," said Flap quietly. "Then you'll be all right, won't you?"

They took the little boy back with them, saw him safely to a small cottage, and walked back towards their meadow. A big man, in rough tweed coat and knickers, and brown leather gaiters, waited beside the caravans. He touched his cap surlily, and spoke to Aunt Gladys.

"Mr. Newall's orders, ma'am," he said. "I'm to return your money, and tell you to be off this land before this afternoon."

THE SCHOOL FRIEND.—No. 166.

"Off this land?" said Aunt Gladys, in astonishment.

"That's right, ma'am. Either that, or you're moved off. I'm Mr. Newall's bailiff. He wants to see you out of the village before nightfall."

If the girls were indignant at that, their feelings were evidently nothing to those of Aunt Gladys'. She stiffened perceptibly.

"Do you know what you are talking about, my man?" she said frigidly.

"Of course," he returned. "I've brought your money—a cheque—"

"I do not accept it!" Aunt Gladys cried. "It suited your master to accept us as his tenants for a week, and now it suits us to stay. We shall not think of moving."

"You'll be turned off!"

"Turned off, indeed? If there is any of that talk we shall apply instantly for protection!" Aunt Gladys cried. "It is quite illegal until our week has expired. Go back and tell your master that! And you can tell him something else—that he ought to be heartily ashamed of himself for allowing three dogs that we have just seen to be at large."

"Yes," chimed in Flap. "They were scaring a little boy dressed in a blue suit—"

"What? A—little boy, dressed in a blue suit?" ejaculated the bailiff, and his whole attitude suddenly changed. "Miss, you don't mean that?"

"I do," said Flap. "He was a sweet little chap, not more than five or six, with curly hair—"

"I know," said the bailiff, in a low voice, and clasped a hand to his forehead. He looked up suddenly. "Where is he—now?"

"We drove the dogs off," said Flap. "Otherwise—"

"You drove them off?" said the man hoarsely. "Thank you—oh, thank you for doing that! He—he is my son!"

"Wha-a-at?" said the girls, in amazed chorus.

"I've told the master before that those hounds ought to be out with someone, or kept chained up," said the bailiff, quite a changed man. "They'll do some mischief some day." He passed a hand across his brow. "I'm sorry, ma'am, that I spoke as I did. I have to do it—it's my orders, and if I didn't do as I was told I'd be sacked by that bully at a moment's notice."

"Why are we to be turned off?" asked Aunt Gladys.

"There are spies in the village, ma'am, and they've heard that you're going to try and get up the pageant," said the bailiff. "Mr. Newall is furious, and wants to get you out of the village."

"I see," nodded Aunt Gladys. "Tell Mr. Newall from us that we shall go at the end of a week, and not before. Take his money back."

"Very good, ma'am," said the now friendly bailiff, and he went.

The indignation of the girls had by no means diminished when the side gate that opened into the field was moved to make room for a fresh arrival. The girls thrilled to see that it was none other than a very red-faced and indignant Mr. Newall who came towards them!

"What's this? What's all this?" he shouted at them. "You refuse to move with your caravans when my bailiff tells you! I'll have you ejected and fined for it!"

"Will you kindly go away out of our field?" asked Aunt Gladys.

"Your field? Your field?" Mr. Newall fairly bellowed. "Don't you

know I've told you to clear off my property?"

"If you are not very careful in what you say, Mr. Newall," said Aunt Gladys, "you will be more than sorry. We are not simple villagers. You cannot bluff us! This land is hired legally from you, and we shall stay here. Please do not try to bully us!"

Mr. Newall looked for the moment like exploding.

"I—I want the land for something else!" he said, changing his tone slightly. "These gipsy caravans—I won't have them so near to my hall! They're an eyesore!"

"We'll cover them with grass!" said Barbara demurely.

"Eh, what was that? Look here, I'm not a man to stand nonsense!" cried Mr. Newall. "You're not wanted in this village, and you're going! Understand that? I've had plenty of your impertinence before. If I'm not master of my estate, what do you think I am to do, eh?"

"You might go and try to eat coke!" suggested Clara softly.

"Coke, eh? My word, so that's your spirit, is it?" Mr. Newall looked as though, on very little provocation, he would have shaken his fist. "You'll be sorry for this; you mark my words!"

Ructions with the "Landlord!"

THERE aren't such things as bogies!"

There was a chuckle in No. 1 caravan as Bessie Bunter made that emphatic statement on the following morning.

Barbara Redfern and the others were, of course, pulling Bessie Bunter's leg. It was quite safe to do it in the early morning. At night, as they all knew, matters were different, and such subjects were strictly to be avoided. Bessie saw quite enough "queer things" without being assisted.

"I suppose you think you're being very clever," went on Bessie, in a severe voice. "Talking about bogies and ghosts, indeed! I only wish there were! You'd be jolly glad to have me then to protect you!"

"They live in fields, Fatima," said Mabel Lynn mischievously.

"Bogies in fields!" scoffed the fat girl.

"You'll say in a minute that I'm jolly well afraid to go out of the caravan, I suppose?"

"It looks as though you are!" chuckled Augusta Anstruther-Browne. "You're a jolly long while fiddling about, and you know you offered to cook breakfast and make early tea if we let you off washing-up!"

"Then you see me!" said Bessie valiantly.

She walked with a bold step across the caravan and opened the door.

A large brown face, surmounted by a pair of horns, looked up at Bessie from not a foot distant!

Bessie slammed the door again and shrieked.

"Help! There's a bib-bib-bogey outside now!"

The girls simply stared at Bessie.

"If you think you're pulling our legs," began Babs.

"I ain't p-p-pulling your legs!" stammered Bessie. "It's a real bogey. It's got two horns, and it sprang at me and tried to bite me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I tell you it's a fact!" cried Bessie. "You go and see, if you think it so jolly funny!"

Babs tumbled out of her bunk and opened the door. She saw a big brown shape, and burst into a peal of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha! There's Bessie Bunter's bogey, girls!" she cried. "It's an old cow!"

"An old cow?" gasped Bessie. "Oh, really! I—I quite thought—I mean, I knew it all the time! He, he, he! Ever been had, Babs?"

"But a cow!" said Mabel Lynn. "In the field, Babs?"

Babs' answer was startling.

"Yes. And it isn't alone! I can see a lot of them moving about everywhere!"

Marjorie Hazeldene popped a head out of the tent, erected between two caravans to accommodate four girls, and shrieked.

"Oh, Clara, quickly! There are a lot of horrid cows in the field! Do drive them away. They'll eat up all our things, and you know how I hate cows! Oh, look! That one's got my silk stockings that I washed last night!"

Babs, Mabs, and Augusta were hurriedly dressing. Bessie Bunter, despite her boasted bravery, was watching cautiously from the window. She was the last to leave No. 1 caravan when the others descended.

"Look, Babs!" said Clara Trevlyn, as she and Flap Derwent appeared from the tent. "There are a dozen cows in the field, and no gates open! What does it mean?"

Peggy Preston, Phyllis Howell, and Freda Foote appeared from No. 2 caravan.

"Mr. Newall must have ordered them to be put in here!" said Peggy.

Babs gave a cry.

"Why, of course! I suppose there's nothing in our agreement to prevent him putting cows in the field if he wants to. He thinks they'll scare us away! If we complained at all, he'd say they'd strayed in here, and he didn't know anything about it."

"We'll show him what we think of cows," chuckled Clara Trevlyn. "Sorry, Marjorie, but I'm afraid your silk stockings have gone!"

Babs had already hurried away with Flap Derwent to investigate. They found two gates in the side of the field. The further one, leading to fields beyond, was barred and padlocked.

"Then they must have come through that side one," said Flap.

"It opens into a path amongst the trees—rather a queer place to keep cows," demurred Babs.

"But they haven't come into the field by aeroplane," said Flap. "Someone's opened a gate. It wouldn't be the one in the lane because we padlocked that ourselves. There's only this gate amongst the trees that can have been used."

"All right," smiled Babs. "Open it. We'll soon drive them back!"

The girls all set to work to drive the intruders back to their own quarters. Bessie Bunter joined in until a cow looked at her and seemed to consider the possibility of chasing Bessie. The fat girl took to her heels, gained No. 1 caravan, and was seen no more for a long while.

But the cows proved quite docile animals. They moved across the field, and one by one went through the gate. They were safely out of the way when Bessie consented to appear again and cook breakfast.

"Undoubtedly Mr. Newall's doing," said Aunt Gladys, when they sat at breakfast. "So that's the sort of man he is? He thinks he'll scare us away if we can't be moved by any other method. I'm afraid that he has a few lessons to learn!"

"I'm not afraid of his silly old cows!" declared Bessie Bunter, amidst laughter.

Babs spoke for all then voiced her own views.

"He thinks we're just schoolgirls and can be treated like so many children!" she said. "That's the idea he's got. We've got to prove that we can stick to a thing. The way he's treating the villagers is absolutely unjust, and we couldn't do less than stop and help them with the pageant, whatever happened!"

A shouting cry came right on top of her words. Turning in surprise the girls saw Mr. Newall striding towards them.

"What do you mean by it, hey? What do you mean by it?" he shouted.

"Mean by what?" said Babs, in amazement.

"Oh, you know—you know!" thundered Mr. Newall. "Turning all those cows into my gardens—I'll make you sorry for it! Every flower in the beds trampled down, and half the things in my kitchen garden eaten up!"

"Just a minute!" interposed Babs.

"I opened the gate the cows went through. It was the only one in the field that was not locked. How is that? And why were the cows here at all?"

"I—I—I'll put my cows where I like!" stuttered Mr. Newall.



EVICTED!

Phyllis Howell was the first to notice the unexpected sight. "Girls!" she cried. "Come here! Look at our belongings!"

"There's been an accident, I can see," said Babs. "But apparently it simply means this, Mr. Newall. You turned those cows into this field and deliberately padlocked the gate so that we couldn't drive them out again. Would you care for that sort of thing to become generally known?"

Mr. Newall went purple, but did not answer the question.

It was a blunt and very difficult question for anyone to answer.

Mr. Newall apparently came to the conclusion at length that it was quite beyond him.

"You shall be sorry!" he vowed, and would have turned away if the girls had not stopped him.

"That's a rather threatening thing to say, Mr. Newall!" Babs called. "There are twelve witnesses to what you said just then. If you try any other ways of getting us out of here you will be very sorry, indeed. You'd better take a warning. We're as determined about this as we are about the pageant!"

"Hear, hear!" chorused the girls.

Mr. Newall gave them one last furious glare and stamped away, followed by a

merry peal of laughter. The girls felt that the new owner of Keighley Hall deserved that.

Great was the indignation of the villagers when the girls told them, that morning, of what had happened, but they chuckled delightedly when they heard the ultimate result of the new "Squire's" astuteness.

"Serve 'un right," said more than one.

Which showed that Mr. Newall was quite universally disliked.

Those who could get away from their work were invited to attend a first rehearsal of the pageant that morning, but the girls were chiefly concerned with the children who were home for the holidays. They found them bright, chummy, and remarkably intelligent youngsters. Practising for the pageant became little more than a jolly game for all of them.

"You've got such fine ideas for getting a thing up!" one of the girls confided to Babs. "It's going to be better than ever this year!"

Babs, herself, could not help feeling that it would be quite good. The villagers were working with all their hearts.

Signs of their returning enthusiasm were not lacking anywhere. Many a flag had stolen out of the little cottage windows and now hung, gaily and defiantly, in the breeze. Mr. Newall was not going to have everything his own way.

After an early dinner the girls carried things still further. They found that costumes were usually hired from a London firm, and sent off a long letter ordering everything that would be necessary. One and all, the artisans of the town had resolved to construct what they could in their spare time. Huge rustic arches to cross the street were being undertaken by the blacksmith and a few friends. The village girls and boys were busy on paper chains and bright coloured rosettes to use in decorating. Sunmold should be gay! they all resolved.

By evening things had progressed further than the most sanguine could have hoped. Inspired by the Cliff House girls the villagers collected almost without exception to rehearse the pageant.

What a triumphal march it was through the main street of the village!

And how they stopped, almost with one accord, to raise a cheer outside the gates of Keighley Lodge! Mr. Newall had tried to make them do just as he wished, but he had not broken their spirit. That he was in hearing distance of their cheer became evident later in the evening when he scorched backwards and forwards through the village in his car in such a careless and desperate manner.

"We'll have our pageant after all—and all thanks to you!" said Granny, with tears in her aged eyes, when the rehearsal was over. "I've brought a photograph with me—perhaps you'd like to see it? 'Tis of Old Squire we've talked about so much—maybe you'll feel you could love him as much as we do."

The girls gazed eagerly at the picture of the man who had been supplanted by this tyrant who wanted to bend everyone to his will. They saw a wrinkled, but genial and jolly face—the typical face of an Old English country gentleman.

They pressed her to know whether any news had come from London; whether he was still fighting his claim. But Granny did not know.

Some of them were very thoughtful when they went back to their camping ground to make preparations for the night. They half expected some further mischief on Mr. Newall's part, but found nothing to alarm them. It was dusk before anyone but Bessie thought of supper, and, by the time the meal was over, it was bedtime.

To-night it was the turn of Babs, Mabs, Bessie, and Augusta to sleep in the tent. Three of them went cheerfully, but the fourth, and fattest, went with many misgivings.

"I hope there aren't any horrid old cows to-night!" shivered Bessie. "Ooooooh! I don't really think I ought to be turned out of my beautiful bed in the caravan, considering how delicate I am!"

"Turn in and don't be silly!" laughed Mabs. "You've got a fine straw palliasso to sleep on."

"Ow! What was that?" gasped Bessie suddenly. "Did you hear it? Like a groan! Oh, I say! There it is again!"

The other three exchanged glances. They certainly had heard something. As Bessie said, it was like a groan—a moaning sound that rose eerily on the night air.

"The wind in the trees, perhaps," shrugged Babs.

Bessie Bunter went to the flap of the tent and peeped out just for a second. In that second she gave a shriek of alarm and bolted behind her chums.

"Look out! Help!" yelled Bessie Bunter. "It's an old gig-gig-ghost! I've seen it out in the field! Help!"

Mr. Newall's Triumph!

BESSIE!

"You silly goose!"

"What on earth—"

Three angry exclamations rewarded Bessie Bunter for her zeal in making such a startling discovery in the meadow.

"I tell you I saw it!" gasped Bessie fearfully. "It was all white and wavy! Oh dear! I'm going to get in the caravan; I ain't going to stop here!"

"You'd better go!" said Babs, with a grim smile. "If you look outside the tent again you may see several more ghosts!"

Groan!

"My hat! What was that?" gasped

Mabel Lynn.

THE SCHOOL FRIEND.—No. 165.

This time there were no smiles. It was unmistakable. The wind moaning in the trees never made quite so eerie a sound as that.

Babs moved the flap of the tent and peeped outside. She had turned in a second, and there was an odd ring in her voice when she spoke.

"Bessie's right!"

"Never!"

"Yes, there really is something in the field. It's all white and waves about! It's that that makes the noise; I heard it groan!"

Augusta gave a grim smile.

"Perhaps they think that ghosts are more likely to move us than cows, Babs. Shall we go out and have a closer look?"

"I think we'd better," said Babs.

Bessie held her arm fearfully.

"Dud-dud-don't go out, Babs! Throw something at it! It—it might try and gig-gig-gobble you up!"

"You silly goose!" said Babs, unable to resist a smile.

"I—I ain't a goose! They sometimes call them goblins—"

Babs went out of the tent, followed by her two chums. Dark shapes moved and came to her side. She saw the well-known figure of Clara Trevlyn.

"Seen it?" said Clara in a whisper.

"Yes," nodded Babs, gazing round.

"It's gone now. But I'm quite sure that—"

"Over there, dear!" whispered sharp-eyed Mabs. "I can see something moving! It's trying to get a better position. Shall we creep forward?"

"Get down flat, all of us!" Babs returned. "We want to have a closer look at it."

There were seven or eight of them. It needed not a little courage to go forward, in spite of the fact that none of them entertained a serious belief in the appearance of spectral people—especially in meadows. That moan had not been a pleasant sound to hear at night. The eerie and ghostly movements, lacking any explanation, were enough to startle any girls.

"There!"

A whisper arrested them all as they crawled slowly forward over the ground. The white figure had appeared again in the starlight, coming from the shadow of the trees.

Mo-o-ooooan!

It was a nerve-racking sound.

Clara touched Babs' arm and whispered.

"I've found a nice lump of earth!" she breathed. "Shall I throw it? If it's a ghost it'll go right through it, won't it?"

"Throw it!" said Babs.

Clara Trevlyn took aim for a mighty throw. Clara was very good at throwing things.

Whi-i-i-iz!

The aim was good and true. The clod was given an excellent opportunity of passing through the thin and empty air that is supposed to constitute a ghost.

If ghosts possess faces, the clod sailed for just the place where a face should be.

Thud!

"Ow!" gasped a voice.

The "ghost," far from allowing the clod to pass through it, staggered and all but fell over.

"It's a man!" yelled Babs, and leapt to her feet. "Well done, Clara! After it, girls! After it!"

The sight that followed was one of the queerest imaginable.

With no more groans, and abandoning all attempts to wave, the ghost set off across the field at a very creditable run indeed.

"I knew it wasn't a ghost!" yelled Bessie Bunter, actually joining in the

chase. "Catch it! I'll jolly well pull its hair!"

The girls pelted along for all they were worth, now quite recovered from any scare they had received, and resolved to find out the identity of their mysterious visitor.

"Look out! The stream, girls!" Babs cried suddenly. "Don't run into it!"

The ghost had gained the two-plank bridge which Bessie had crossed on her way to the wrong picnic. It set hasty and stumbling feet on the old wood—and the bridge broke!

Crash!

Splash!

"Ow-er!"

With a shriek of alarm the ghost toppled sideways and disappeared beneath the water.

"It's gone! It—whatever it is!" chortled Clara gleefully.

"Ha, ha, ha! Oh, just look!"

The mirth of the girls was interrupted as the figure came to the surface. It no longer bore any resemblance to a spectre.

What the girls saw was a very wet and bedraggled man, over whose shoulder trailed a sodden sheet.

And that man was someone they all knew!

"It's Mr. Knowall!" shrieked Bessie Bunter.

Mr. Newall stood in the water, coughed, and puffed, and tried to rub the water out of his eyes.

"Ow! Oh dear! The beastly bridge—"

The girls stood on the bank in a gleeful chorus. That Mr. Newall himself should have undertaken such a job surpassed their expectations. What he had received served him very well right. Clara said so.

"Funny time for a bathe, Mr. Newall," said Babs pleasantly.

"Ah!" gasped Mr. Newall.

"Is the water chilly?"

"You—you—"

"But perhaps Mr. Newall is fishing," said Babs. "Do you think he stands a ghost of a chance of catching anything but a cold, girls?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Newall floundered out on to the opposite bank and shook a wet and weedy fist at them.

"I believe you knew the bridge was broken!" he gasped.

"We didn't!" said Babs. "But we'd have broken it cheerfully if we'd known what you were going to do!"

"I—I—I—" stuttered Mr. Newall.

"Don't stand about," said Clara in a mothering voice. "I'm sure you'll catch cold. Pleasant dreams, Mr. Newall! Perhaps you'll dream that you're swimming to France!"

"He, he, he!" giggled Bessie Bunter.

"I'll have you out of this meadow now!" shouted Mr. Newall. "You mark my words! You sha'n't be here much longer! I'll make you pay for this!"

"But don't sit up in your wet things to make out the bill!" admonished Babs. "Do that in the morning! Shall we have to pay Entertainment Tax as well? It's worth it, you know! So-long, Mr. Newall!"

Mr. Newall stamped his wet and weary way back to Keighley Hall with feelings that may better be imagined than described.

It was quite a long while before the girls went to sleep after their late alarm. All of them—even Bessie—dozed off at last, however.

When they awoke on the following morning, it was to find the meadow looking as peaceful as it had ever looked. There were no cows to-day. Several girls gleefully inspected the place which Mr. Newall had chosen for his midnight

plunge, but there was no sign of the gentleman in question.

The whole day passed without any out-of-the-way incident; and the following morning brought them measurably nearer to the pageant. It also brought a letter, however, that was of a distinctly worrying nature. Aunt Gladys gave an annoyed exclamation as soon as she read it.

"The costumes, girls—they've been sent off wrongly!"

"Wrongly?" the girls repeated, almost in consternation.

"Yes, to Bridgewest," said Aunt Gladys, looking at the letter again. "I know it. It's five or six miles from here, and a very out-of-the-way place. They'll be heavy baskets. I can't understand what should possess them to send them there—in response to our further instructions," as the letter says."

"And the pageant coming off so soon!" Babs breathed. "Why, we were going to have a little dress rehearsal, so that they could alter any costumes that needed it. Aunt Gladys, there's only one thing to be done—and that is to fetch them ourselves."

"How?"

"Could we do it with the caravans?" said Babs hopefully.

Aunt Gladys was enthusiastic.

"Of course!" she exclaimed. "It's the very way out of the difficulty; and the horses need real exercise, or they'll be getting lazy. We can make quite a nice outing of it, I'm sure!"

Most of the girls were keen on the trip, so it was arranged that all should go. They could anticipate being back by the early afternoon.

The horses were soon harnessed, and the vehicles driving out. As they passed through the village the girls could not help smiling to notice the gala air about the place. It had not been in evidence when they arrived such a short time ago. This renewed cheerfulness, they knew, was due to their own example.

The ride to Bridgewest was quite uneventful, and they found the dress-baskets waiting for them at the station, and, with assistance, soon packed them into the caravans. It was little after their usual dinner-time when they had dined and were on the road again.

They stopped when they reached the blacksmith's shop to leave the baskets, and drove on with the caravans. Phyllis Howell was the first to notice an unexpected sight.

"Why, girls, there's someone in our meadow!" she exclaimed.

Every eye turned in that direction.

"My word, yes!" muttered Mabs.

"There are two or three men—"

"What's that pile in the road—right outside?" continued Phyllis. "It—it looks— My word, it is! Girls, that's the tent and all the gear we left in the field! It's been thrown out and piled anyhow!"

"Then we've been evicted!" said Clara in quite a hollow voice.

No one else spoke for the moment. The truth of Clara's words was too obvious for words to be necessary. Three men stood inside the fence that separated the meadow from the road, their feet apart, their arms folded in front. They were big men all of them. Nothing that had belonged to the Cliff House girls remained in the field. The pile on the grass was a pile of all that they had left behind.

Aunt Gladys addressed the sheepish-looking bailiff, whose son they had saved from the out-of-hand dogs.

"What is the meaning of this? Why are our things here?"

"Sorry, ma'am!" he said apologetically. "Master's orders. He's turned all

your things out, and we're to see that you don't come back on to his land. We're to stay here for the rest of the day, and put up a barbed-wire fence this evening. We've got to stop you if you try to come in."

"Then we shall not attempt that," said Aunt Gladys dryly.

She called a consultation at once. The girls were very angry. Clara and Flap were for rushing the place and getting the caravans back, heedless of consequences. Aunt Gladys could see what those consequences would be.

"The man's in the wrong, but he's got a good case to fight," she said. "He's evicted us, and without using force of any sort. We were silly to go without someone mounting guard."

"I reckon it's all a plot of his, and that's why the dresses went wrong—a false telegram, perhaps!" said Babs hotly.

"Very likely," said Aunt Gladys. "But we're out now. Possession, they say, is nine points of the law. It's too difficult a situation for us to attempt to fight it. Of course, it's a last desperate attempt to drive us out of the village, but it won't accomplish that. There is only one thing—and that is to pack everything in the caravan and look for a fresh site."

The girls were just incensed, but saw the wisdom of what Aunt Gladys said. Almost silent, they packed their disordered things neatly together, the only loquacious voice being that of Bessie who bewailed the muddy state of certain cooking implements. When everything had been disposed of they turned the caravans and set off, with not one look back at the meadow.

"Turned out of the meadow?"

The blacksmith's voice was trembling with indignation when Aunt Gladys told the villagers that they were looking for a fresh site.

"Yes," Babs said very quietly, "of course, we might have expected it. As it happens—"

"The bully! The arrant bully!" cried the smith, and banged one huge fist into an open palm. "Lads, it's the last straw. We can't stick this. Turned the young ladies out when they've been with their caravans to do us such a good turn! Up, men—up against the bailiff and his crowd!"

"Oh, don't go as far as that, please!" Babs cried.

But the blacksmith, with shining and honest eyes, gave her a kind but determined smile.

"Miss, it's the biggest insult we've had yet! He's gone too far this time. We'll give the bailiff and those others the hiding they deserve for backing up such a man. We'll get that meadow back. It's time someone defied Mister Newall. Clear me out of the village if he likes, he knows about it this time!"

He strode to the door, bearded, roughly dressed in his leathern apron and clattering, hobnailed boots, but a gentleman at heart. Others were rallying to the clarion note that his words had struck.

"Smith! Why, what's the matter?" asked a voice.

At the sound of the gentle, refined tones the blacksmith stopped dead, and a gnarled, tough hand stole to touch his forelock. The girls looked up at the speaker who had come so quietly on the scene, and, with beating hearts, guessed his identity at once.

The upright, honest figure, the kindly, wrinkled face seemed familiar instantly. It did not need the smith's blunt, "Sorry, squire! I didn't know 'ee wor here!" to tell them who the unexpected visitor was.

Mr. Newall's Drastic Act!

THE old squire, the kindly and generous soul who had been turned out by bullying Mr. Newall, back in his village!

Why?

None were more excited to know than the Cliff House girls, although for the time being they had modestly effaced themselves and their caravans, and established a fresh camp on the village green—the only place left.

For all that, the girls were curious—very curious indeed. And when at long last the erect and stately figure was seen coming in their direction, their delight knew no bounds.

"I am charmed to meet those who have proved such good friends of our dear old village of Sunmold!" was his greeting.

And what a grace and charm there was in his old-world manner!

They could understand how his very presence had calmed the angry blacksmith and prevented him from causing what might have proved a very serious scene. He shook hands slowly with each girl, and pronounced their names. Then he smiled again.

"And it is to you that Sunmold will be indebted for its pageant, after all!" smiled the old squire. "Well done—well done! I feel that I should like to say a lot more. It seems almost providential that you have come along as you have. As you have done so much and have heard so many things, I wish to tell you everything."

In the quiet and steady voice that was so soothing and pleasing he told the story of his own misfortunes, and what had been happening in London.

"I came down to see Mr. Newall," he said. "Unfortunately, he refused to see me. You will understand the difficult position that I am in. I did not wish to be seen in the village, but I could see nothing else to be done."

He went on, after a short pause:

"I am not deserving of much of the pity that I believe has been given to me. Although I have had to leave Keighley Hall, I am still a comparatively rich man, as I have automatically taken the London estate that Mr. Newall has left. It is having to part with all my friends in this dear village that had grieved me so much, especially because I know why Mr. Newall was so anxious to come here.

"To-morrow, in London, my appeal will be heard. I hoped, as I have fresh evidence to bring forward, that I might compromise with Mr. Newall, but that is now made impossible. By to-morrow evening I think the result of my appeal should be known. If it should be my luck to return to Sunmold, believe me, I shall never forget those 'strangers' who have done so much for the village."

Long after he had gone excited and almost anxious talk could be heard amongst the caravanners.

Keighley Lodge—was there really a possibility that it would change hands again? Would the greedy and spiteful Mr. Newall be bundled out of the place as abruptly as he had come? How the girls wished that he would!

"Is Mrs. Redfern there?"

The gruff, harsh voice that came abruptly to their ears just when they had finished dressing the following morning was recognised instantly. Only then, however, the girls saw the luxurious car that had come softly along the road.

"Yes, I am here," said Aunt Gladys.

Mr. Newall scowled her a greeting.

"So you have not left the village?" he said abruptly.

"In view of the way you have treated

us, we should not think of going!" said Aunt Gladys. "There are several things we should like to say to you, particularly about your action in dressing up."

Mr. Newall flushed crimson.

"I haven't come here to argue and talk!" he interrupted. "I've come to talk about the pageant that you have arranged shall take place to-morrow and the following days. It is not to take place. That is my order, and it shall not be defied by my tenants, or by—a crowd of girls in a caravan."

"That's a pity," said Babs in the same gentle tone. "We wanted to sell you a sixpenny ticket to watch it, but, of course—"

"You may think it a subject for jokes!" burst in the man. "You will soon find it is not. I'll have you evicted from here before the day is out. I'll make it hot for those defiant villagers, too. You keep your eyes open to-day and see what happens. I can't actually stop the pageant, but you'll be very sorry if you don't take a hint in time and clear off while you can!"

"Put another sausage in the pan, Bessie," said Babs cheerily. "I'm sure Mr. Newall really wants to stay for breakfast, and that's why he's hanging about such a long while."

Mr. Newall drove away with a baffled fury that was easy to understand.

None of the girls could forget the threatening words that the irate Mr. Newall had used. To their surprise, however, they neither saw him nor heard of him in the village that morning. In the afternoon, when they expected that, at the very least, he would appear at their rehearsals in a passionate burst of anger, they found things going more smoothly than ever. Mystified, but with an increasing confidence that he had only been "bluffing," they carried on.

But for the queer and strangely sinister grin that they saw once on the face of one Simon Snogall, a known toady to Mr. Newall, most of the girls would have been ready to conclude that the owner of Keighley Hall was powerless to carry out his threats. The villagers, however, treated the spying Simon with the scorn he deserved, and the fellow lounged past without saying anything. Just jealousy, was it?

Tea was over, and the girls had nearly finished the washing-up when a heavy lorry, carrying six or seven men, clattered past them and disappeared into the village in a cloud of dust.

"My word! Someone's getting busy!" exclaimed Babs. "I wonder what that thing is doing round here?"

Mabs hung the tea-cloth on an impromptu clothes-line between the caravans, and shook her head.

"I'm still worried about what Mr. Newall said," she remarked. "Don't you think we'd better get into the village and just find out what he's doing after all?"

The girls agreed, finished their work off quickly, and started. They turned a corner and saw, to their amazement, that the lorry had stopped outside a house they all knew. They recognised the quaint, old-timbered residence instantly as the Gable House, where Granny lived. "My word! It's come here after all!" breathed Babs.

And then she caught her breath, as did all the others. An oldish woman came tottering into the road, saw them, and,

with a choking cry, ran towards them. They caught her and supported her trembling figure, or Mrs. "Granny" Forbes would have fallen in the road.

"Oh, girls! It's happened! It's happened!" sobbed the old lady, tears pouring down her wrinkled cheeks. "I'm to be turned out of the Gable House, and put in that little old cottage over there!"

"Turned out!" the girls gasped incredulously. "But surely, Granny, that can't really happen! Why are you turned out?"

She was weeping so bitterly that for several seconds she could not go on.

"It's Mister Newall's revenge for—the pageant!" sobbed Granny, at last. "Oh, girls, he—he knows how we all love the Gable House, and how proud we are of it. He says if the village doesn't care for his wishes he—he won't care for theirs. He's going to pull the Gable House down at once—to extend his gardens. And he can do it—it's on his own ground!"

Cliff House Takes a Hand!

THE girls stood there in the road, not knowing which way to look, nor what to do next. The house-breakers who had come in the lorry were already moving about in the front garden of the Gable House, their boots crushing the flowers of which the old lady had been so proud. Two of them had started to move furniture from the entrance lobby into the roadway.

Like wildfire the news had spread round the village. Granny, broken and tearful, was just one figure in the midst of the indignant rustics. An ominous and hostile murmur swelled with every minute that passed. The proposed act of vandalism was bringing them all nearer to mutiny than they had ever been before.

And then—a sudden hush, almost a silence. A horse's hoofs clattered on the cobble-stones and Mr. Newall, on a spirited mount, appeared before them. The girls looked at his face, and they could see the flush of anger in his cheeks, and the glittering, triumphant malice in his eyes.

"What's all this about?" he cried, with never one glance at the girls. "What's all this crowd—some political meeting, hey? Constable, why don't you clear the street? There'll be trouble if any fast car comes through here."

"They says as Gable House is to be pulled down, Mr. Newall," said a voice.

"Pulled down?" said the mounted man carelessly. "Why, that's so! I don't like it there—it's in the way of my garden. But why are all these men standing round?"

"You've turned poor old Granny out!" burst out the timid little grocer, with quite a new fire in his tones.

"I've given her another cottage; you can't grumble about that! Are you trying to criticise me, my man?" Mr. Newall thundered.

"Ay!" said the grocer, and stood his ground manfully. "'Tis time someone told you what you are, Mister Newall—coward and bully! We know why you're doing this! 'Tis because we're to have pageant to-morrow, and you don't want us to have it!"

"Ay, 'tis right!" came a murmur from everyone.

Mr. Newall sat back arrogantly in his saddle and laughed.

"I thought you'd understand me in time! You have your way and I have mine. This is just the first of the alterations that I'm going to make in Sunmold. There will be plenty more, until we get on better together. There's only room for one master here."

"Ay; the old squire that's gone!"

cried the blacksmith; and there was a cheer.

The mottled colour deepened in Mr. Newall's face.

"Get on with that work there!" he cried to the house-breakers. "Throw the furniture out if they won't remove it! Pull the house down on it! I won't have any time wasted!"

"There's only one thing for it, girls," Babs said gloomily. "We've got to go. Don't you think so?"

They nodded without exception. It was a climb-down; a defeat that came very hard indeed to the girls. But Mr. Newall held trump cards at last. None of them could be selfish enough to insist on "holding on" when they realised what it would mean.

"I'll speak to the blacksmith—he's their leader," said Aunt Gladys; and went.

"You're willing to go, Mrs. Redfern?"

They all heard the blacksmith's question, and saw Aunt Gladys proceeding to explain. Their hearts seemed to beat more quickly when Mr. Anvel suddenly shook his head, and clasped his huge hands together. His voice, clear and loud, rose above the angry murmuring.

"Lads, Mrs. Redfern and the young ladies are willing to clear out of the village to satisfy Mr. Newall!" he cried. "We all know it's because o' them and what they'd done for us that he's so angry. But can we allow it?"

"Never!" came the instant response; and there was a cheer.

"Those who've loved Sunmold and helped us so much—why, they belong to the village as much as we do!" boomed the blacksmith triumphantly. "Mr. Newall, do your worst! Pull down the Gable House if you will; we can't stop you once Granny's furniture is out! Pull it down, but you sha'n't stop our pageant by that means!"

Darker than ever went the face of the man on horseback. For the first time he glanced in the direction of the Cliff House girls—a glance full of bitter and malicious hatred.

"Get on with the work, you slugs-gards!" he shouted at the house-breakers. "Get on the roof and make a start with it now! Now, you lazy, loafing villagers, pull the furniture out or it will go!"

Two of the hired workmen began to scale the outside of the timbered old house. Granny turned away, unable to look again at the place she might never see again.

A moss-grown slate fell from the roof and smashed in the roadway almost at their feet.

"There must be some way of stopping it!" gasped Babs.

A seething excitement had taken possession of the villagers. Some were helping to remove the furniture, but the others just stood, helpless spectators of the cruel act of vandalism on the part of the all-powerful village bully.

Crash! Crash!

Demolition had started. Right on the top of the roof one of the men was busy with a pickaxe, his figure forming a significant and tragic silhouette against the skyline.

"My hat!" said Clara suddenly. "How about that bonfire that Granny has been getting ready in the garden?"

"Bonfire? What ever do you mean?" gasped Babs.

But Clara was already explaining. It was a "plan"—a reckless but promising plan—that fired the imagination of the girls instantly. Details were discussed in whispers that no one heeded. With a box of matches in her hand, Clara Trevlyn stole away at last, and the girls waited!

Clash! Clatter, clatter!

The house-breakers were not working as though they relished their job, but they

ANSWERS
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were getting on slowly. A jagged hole began to appear in the roof. A stout, blackened old chimney had disappeared. And then—

"Fire!"
Almost simultaneously the Cliff House girls gave vent to that startling cry as the first faint puff of smoke came from the Gable House.

"Where? What is on fire?" went up startled murmurs from the onlookers.
"The Gable House on fire!" shrieked Babs & Co.

It seemed true. Their sharp eyes had noticed the trouble before anyone else. Now, however, there was a sudden crackling sound, and smoke whirled about the old house.

"Fire! It's alight!" Babs cried.
"Follow me, girls!"

She led the way to a shed behind the smithy. They had seen the shed, and its contents before. Trained to fire drill at Cliff House, they would have very little difficulty in understanding how everything worked.

With cries for the villagers to stand back, they rushed the fire brigade apparatus from its shed, and pulled up breathlessly in front of the house, round which smoke was still eddying.

"Stand away!" roared Mr. Newall.
Mabel Lynn, with supreme unconcern, ran out the length of hose that would suck water from the horse-pond.

"Let it burn down! It'll be as well that way as any other!" shouted the furious owner.

Phyllis Howell, Flap Derwent, and Peggy Preston began to work the hand-pump lustily. Babs, with the most innocent expression possible, held the nozzle carelessly in her hand and regarded Mr. Newall.

"Don't you want the fire put out, sir?" she said.

She felt the hose begin to throb as the pump started to do its work.

"No! It's only a little smoke! I don't believe it is a fire at all! Look out with that nozzle, girl! Turn it away! Oh!"

"Swi-i-ish!"
Mr. Newall shrieked. A stream of water spouted from the nozzle, and, instead of extinguishing the fire, very nearly extinguished Mr. Newall. There was no time for him to get out of the direction in which Babs had so "carelessly" pointed the nozzle.

"Oh dear! How silly of me!" gasped Babs, and immediately turned the hose upwards—right on the uncertain house-breakers on the roof.

"Look out!"
"We'll be drenched!"
Never had house-breakers descended more quickly than those two did from the roof of the Gable House!

The villagers, seeing the results of Babs' artless behaviour, began to peal with merriment.

"Stop that hose! Take the thing away!" bellowed the very much splashed Mr. Newall. "I can see now! The house isn't on fire at all! It's a bonfire at the back!"

"Better make sure!" said Babs, and played the hose on those workmen who had had the temerity to remain within range. They did not linger much longer. It wasn't safe, with such a clumsy fire-fighter as Babs in charge of the hose!

"Turn that water off! Stop pumping!" shrieked Mr. Newall. "It's a trick! Come back, you men! Get on with that work immediately!"
But the men did not come back.

The Cliff House girls, once started on their desperate counter-move, were determined to see it through. Flap, Phyllis, and Peggy were pumping harder than ever, causing the water simply to sing through the nozzle.

"I won't be beaten! I'll do it myself!" vowed Mr. Newall madly. "Stand back there! Give me a pick! I'll not be beaten by a pack of impudent schoolgirls!"

Babs turned the hose on him, conscious that it was a reckless action, but determined not to give in now.

The horse reared and plunged, and Mr. Newall abruptly changed his mind. There was really nothing else for him to do. No one could have faced such a solid stream. As he galloped to safety the crowd cheered delightedly.

"Well done, the girls! That's the way to deal with the bully!"

The Gable House had been saved—but for how long?

After several minutes had passed Mr. Newall was seen returning.

The bonfire that Clara Trevlyn had so secretly lit had practically burnt itself out. The owner of Keighley Hall, very wet, and in a furious temper, regarded the girls with smouldering eyes.

"I'll have the law on you for this!" he threatened.

"When we were trying to put out the fire?" said Babs demurely.

"Fire!" he snarled. "You knew—"

A shriek interrupted him.
He turned his head, as did everyone else, to the doorway of the village post-office. A girl stood there waving a slip of paper in her hand.

"Listen—listen, all of you!" she cried, excitedly. "It's a telegram from London! It's the news at last!"

"The news!" the villagers cried.

"It's about you, Mr. Newall, bully and upstart!" cried the girl, and capered delightedly. "The appeal's been successful. Old squire has won the day, and he's coming back to-morrow to bundle you neck and crop out of the village!"

"Old squire coming back?" went up a cry. And then—

"Hurrah!"
The village street seemed almost to shake with the cheering. Men and women danced together and shouted and laughed. The old squire had won! Sunmold was saved!

And in the midst of it all Mr. Newall, with a brow as black as thunder, gave a baffled and defiant cry. He spurred his horse, and clattered furiously back to Keighley Hall. They saw him going, and they hissed—a hissing that made him ride more recklessly than ever! Mr. Newall was beaten at last!

And the old squire, as they affectionately called him, was expected back at any minute. Those who were to enact the historical and time-honoured pageant of Sunmold were dressed and waiting outside the village. With them were the Cliff House girls and their gay caravans. Everyone had insisted that the pageant would not be complete without them!

What a difference the last minute legal victory in London was going to make! Yes, it was a master-stroke on the part of the blacksmith. The pageant should meet the old squire himself and welcome him back in real triumph through the bunting-decked streets of the gay little village.

A cloud of dust was seen in the distance at last, and Babs gave a cry.

"There's a car coming, girls!" she ejaculated. "Surely this must be the squire at last!"

"I ought to make a speech, really!" said Bessie Bunter excitedly.

"The squire! It is the squire!" went up a booming shout.

"Hurrah! Hurrah!"
"Welcome home!"

They could see the squire at last, his kindly face alight with joy, his bearing almost nervous at the clamorous expres-

sions of joy and loyalty. Despite Bessie's claim to eloquence, it was the blacksmith who delivered a short and heartfelt speech of welcome before they cheered again.

And then the procession and pageant started at last.

Right in the middle of the main street they came on the queerest sight imaginable. A big and luxurious touring-car was stationary there, while a red-faced, confused-looking man juggled frantically with his levers.

"It's Mister Newall! He hasn't gone yet!" cried several amazed voices.

"He's trying to stop our procession even now!" the blacksmith cried out. "We can spare a moment to move him, lads! Come on!"

"I'm not trying to stop you!" cried an anxious and very different Mr. Newall from the one they had known the previous night. "The car's broken down!"

"Stuff and nonsense!" cried the blacksmith, and whispered to his muscular companions: "We'll soon clear the road!"

"Leave my car alone! Oh, not there!" shrieked Mr. Newall.

But it did go "there"! And "there" was the horse-pond in the centre of the village! The strong arms of the smith and his friends moved the car along the street with little trouble. In vain the returned squire tried to protest. Someone took charge of the steering-wheel, and the car was run down the slope to the pond. There it stopped, with water almost to the tops of its wheels, and Mr. Newall still in his seat, helpless.

The procession started on again and passed the pond. It was the last that any of them were to see of the ex-owner of Keighley Hall, but he and his car were still in the pond when they passed out of sight!

Presently they were in the grounds of the magnificent home itself; big doors were flung wide for welcoming servants to raise a cheer of their own. Then, and only then, was the squire allowed to rise to make a speech of his own.

He spoke in a voice full of emotion, thanking them for their reception, and telling what joy it was to return to the place he loved so well. The future, he felt sure, would be a happy one for all of them. The Gable House, of course, should be repaired—fortunately, the housebreakers had done little real damage. Those who had been supplanted in their village shops should resume control again—there would be an end of "profiteering." The bolder spirits who had been expelled from their homes by autocratic Mr. Newall were to be invited to return. Everything should be put right again!

With what joy all those promises were received may well be imagined; but the cheering was loudest of all when the Cliff House girls, despite their protests, were thanked for the share they had taken in fighting the village tyrant.

"It's lucky they came this way—lucky indeed!" cried the old squire. "And may we be favoured with a long visit from the Jolly Caravanners!"

THE END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

(Next Thursday's issue of the SCHOOL FRIEND will contain "The Convict's Daughter!"—a magnificent new long complete story of the girls of Cliff House School, by Hilda Richards; another splendid "Caravan" Number of the "Cliff House Weekly"; and further long instalments of "No Joy in Her Riches!" by Joan Inglesart, and "Friendship Forbidden!" by Ida Melbourne. Order your copy of the SCHOOL FRIEND in advance to avoid disappointment.)

THE SCHOOL FRIEND.—No. 166.

OUR FINE SCHOOL AND MYSTERY SERIAL.



By
IDA MELBOURNE.

CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY.

DOLORES KALENZI, a dark-eyed, olive-complexioned, and very attractive Eastern girl, who, by the orders of her aunt, is forbidden the friendship of
KITTY CRICHTON, PEARL HARDY & CO., the upright and light-hearted Fourth-Formers at Limmershaw High School.
YELMA KALENZI, the aunt of Dolores, who is really not at all an unkindly woman, but is under the strict orders of Dolores' uncle.

None of the happy freedom of the Limmershaw High School girls was allowed Dolores Kalenzi. Twice a day, at the finish of her lessons, her aunt called at the school to take her home, and on account of this the Eastern girl naturally became an object of ridicule amongst most of the High School girls. She was there to study—nothing more, said her aunt, and she was to make no friends with Kitty Crichton & Co.

The Limmershaw girls had the great fortune to discover a vast treasure in a cave among the cliffs. But shortly afterwards the treasure was stolen from the school, and Dolores discovered its hiding-place—in the dungeon beneath her own home! For the sake of her aunt, she put the girls off the track.

The police took the matter up, and in the midst of all the excitement an aeroplane suddenly appeared, and seemed about to land near Dolores' home.

(Read on from here.)

A New Mystery!

THE noise of the engine was akin to a roar; it was nearer and clearer. With a gasp, Dolores realised that it was lower.

Not a second did she pause, but, hatless, ran helter-skelter down the stairs. Her aunt opened a door and called. She heard Chilean speak. But she heeded neither.

In a moment she had the door open and was flying down the gravel drive.

The large red machine was lower, and the noise was deafening. Where would it land? The question answered itself. There was but one place likely—the large fields ahead.

On, on she ran, aware now that others had seen the machine, and were racing to greet it.

She entered a large field, and saw the machine descending. Other figures were about the fields, and she recognised Kitty Crichton, Pearl, and others of the High School.

Now the machine had landed, and was taxiing along the ground.

It came to a standstill, and all ran towards it.

A second later the helmeted pilot clambered down, his mechanic followed, and then with their assistance a man behind climbed down.

Round him a crowd gathered, and there was an exclamation.

"Gracious! The hermit!"

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The man turned his bronze, bearded face towards them, and Jane Prestwich hurried forward. Her face was eager, and her purpose obvious.

But someone frustrated her. As she half-ran forward her foot was caught; she stumbled, and soon was lost underfoot in the crowd that surrounded the machine.

And Dolores Kalenzi, knowing that she had saved the situation, momentarily leaned forward for a sight of the old man, the man from Boralia—the man who might know so much—

Why had he landed here. The question throbbled through her brain.

The crowd pressed round the aeroplane, and the pilot tried to edge them away. "Don't touch anything, please!" he urged.

But the girls who had gathered round were curious.

The crowd was large, and Dolores, looking for the hermit, could not find him. In the confusion and excitement he had evidently made his escape.

Most of the village appeared to be present. The noise of the engine and the unusual sight of an aeroplane had attracted everyone who was able to be present.

And the interest in the aeroplane apparently exceeded the interest in the hermit. For he had vanished.

Dolores backed away from the machine. She was as interested in it as anyone; but she was more interested in the hermit—the man who had come the many, many miles from Boralia.

What news had he brought? And why had he landed here?

Was he an agent for the league of the circle and triangle—an enemy of her uncle's?

She wandered away from the machine and the chattering crowd and crossed the field. A hedge was near by, and the hermit must have escaped through it.

Not far away was an opening, and she forced herself through it.

On the other side, she looked back and saw Jane Prestwich searching amongst the crowd. Jane was looking for the hermit. She had tried to speak to him.

And Jane was the last person Dolores wished to learn anything of the affair.

Enemy or friend, the hermit was not an acquaintance of Jane's, and the less that girl knew about him the better.

But Jane had not yet thought of pursuit. And Dolores, relieved in mind, hurried on.

Tracks across the field told her the direction that the man had taken, and she followed.

Where he was going she was not certain. But it seemed obvious that he had a particular destination. It must have

been at his instigation that the machine had landed. Why else should it land in this place?

Was the machine awaiting his return? As though in answer to her question, came the roar of the gigantic aeroplane engines. Dolores turned and saw the red plane moving.

The crowd had scattered, and now the machine rose over the hedgerows and went up, up, up, and far away, till her fascinated eyes had watched it out of sight.

But a voice brought her back to realities.

"He has gone, then?" asked Jane Prestwich.

Dolores started; then, regaining her composure, nodded.

"Apparently. The machine cannot fly of its own accord."

"I didn't mean the pilot—the hermit."

"The hermit?"

"Don't fool me! You know to whom I am referring. The man who came from Boralia. Why has he come?"

"Yes, why? I wonder," agreed Dolores. "Fancy the officer bringing him all the way from Boralia!"

Jane Prestwich regarded her sneeringly.

"I suppose you're going to pretend that you don't know anything about him?"

"I'm not going to pretend," retorted Dolores softly. "I simply don't know anything about him."

Jane Prestwich shrugged her shoulders. "Then if you won't tell me, I must find out—"

"Is it quite necessary that you know?"

Jane did not reply, but strode off across the field.

Dolores looked after her, with lowering brow and heavy heart. Jane would find out. She knew that Jane could be trusted to find out.

And if Jane found out everything, what would happen? There was much that could be found out—much that would lead to unpleasantness. But how could Jane Prestwich be stopped?

Oh, what a tangle it all was!

Dolores sighed, and guided her steps homewards. Mystery after mystery—and every mystery somehow connected with her.

No wonder Jane Prestwich was suspicious! Was not her aunt's behaviour likely to make anyone suspicious?

Miserably she wondered what the mystery was. Why should she not be allowed to have friends? And now her aunt had enjoined her to silence regarding everything that went on in the house.

The hermit had gone when she reached the roadway; she could find no trace of him, and she did the only thing—made her way homewards.

She was rather fearful now of what her aunt would say; she half expected to meet Chileen on his way to fetch her back.

But she reached home in safety.

The door was closed, and she banged upon it. There was no other way in; and as her aunt knew, anyway, that she had gone out it did not matter.

But there was no answer to her knock, and she hammered again.

This time footsteps sounded. She felt rather than saw that Chileen was looking at her through the peep-hole, then the door opened.

But not a word did the servant say.

There were voices in the adjoining room. Her aunt and uncle were talking. They must have seen the aeroplane, she reflected. Her aunt knew that the hermit was coming by it! Were they making plans—preparations?

Was he an enemy they feared?

Somehow the atmosphere of the house seemed strange. They were not as angry as she had expected they would be, and she felt almost disappointed.

Chileen returned to the dining-room, and she went upstairs. The dusky servant had not said a word, and he had shown no excitement.

What could it all mean?

She closed the door of her room and flung herself on the bed. There she lay thinking.

Her books lay about the room. She should be doing homework. But she did not feel like work.

Once she rose, resolving to commence; then she fell to brooding again.

But the sun was sinking in the west, the air became still, the noises of day seemed to die away, and she sat up.

The homework had to be done. She did not wish to get into trouble with her Form-mistress. So, sighing, she gathered her books together and tried to concentrate her thoughts.

Geography. She glanced at the first question:

"An aeroplane starts from Calcutta for a flight to Petrograd. The journey is to be taken as the crow flies in a straight line from town to town. Describe what would be seen—the geographical features, crops, villages, etc., normal conditions. Atmospheric conditions, etc."

This question had been outlined by the mistress, and Dolores had been thrilled at the idea of answering it. She had read of the country over which the machine was presumed to pass, and it gave her imagination scope.

But the thrill was gone now. The question seemed worrying. She did not want to apply her imagination to this; her imagination was occupied with other things—with things that seemed more important. She would rather have had a question that required a definite answer.

The work had to be done, however, and she settled down.

Her lack of interest passed as she opened her atlas and examined it.

She looked out of the window at the shadowy sky, and her eyes became thoughtful and her look far-away. She was thinking of Calcutta, visualising it as she had read of it—its building, its history.

And soon she forgot the house—forgot the fact that she was miles from the land of magic charm, and wrote steadily on.

Night had fallen, and the moon's green light made the rays of the reading-lamp a dull orange when at last she lay down her pen.

She glanced at the clock, and started, realising for the first time that she had had no supper.

Stretching her arms, and moving her numb fingers, she rose, and crossed to the door.

Everywhere seemed quiet, and as she stood on the landing she wondered if they had forgotten her. But from downstairs came the dull, monotone of voices.

A chink of yellow light below told of an opening door, and she drew back. But it was only Chileen, and she smiled as she saw that he carried a round brass tray. Her supper!

She went to the head of the stairs. But her feet made no sound on the thick carpeting, and Chileen did not hear her.

He was looking at the tray and coming upstairs slowly. Her mouth watered as she looked at the appetising array.

What interesting quaint dishes—several dishes there were, such tasty dishes as her uncle ate at times. She had never before been favoured with such a meal!

How attractive it looked!

Chileen was nearer, and she stepped back to the shadows to return to her room lest he should wonder where she had been.

Half-way along the passage she stopped.

Now Chileen was descending, and, half determined to ask him the question, she stepped forward.

As the servant saw her he stopped abruptly.

"Missy Dolores!" he exclaimed.

"My supper, Chileen?" she asked, controlling the impulse to question him.

"Your supper? I forgot. In a moment! I have been taking a box to the lumber-room."

"You bring me my supper quickly, Chileen."

The servant bowed, and descended the stairs. But Dolores did not move. For a second or so she gazed after him. Then she turned her eyes upwards, as though trying to see through the floor above.

Chileen had lied to her. Why? There was someone in the room above—someone there in secret. If not in secret, why should Chileen tell the untruth?

Whom could they be hiding? It was no prisoner. For one did not give prisoners wine and dainty dishes. It was a visitor, and a secret visitor.

She frowned and listened. From



A voice brought her back to realities. Dolores started—the voice belonged to Jane Prestwich!

Chileen had reached the head of the stairs and turned.

She stared after his receding figure.

Why was he going up that small flight of stairs to the empty rooms? How stupid of him! Chileen was not, as a rule, so absent-minded.

She would call after him. Her frown of anger changed to one of amazement as he mounted the small flight of stairs.

How absurd of him! She stepped forward. Then she stopped. For now Chileen was on the landing above. She heard his soft shoes. He had stopped. What was that sound? She put her head on one side and listened, hardly breathing, lest the faint sounds should not be heard.

A clink! Unmistakably he was putting the tray down.

Then—tap, tap!

Chileen was tapping on the door—the door of the empty room—and taking in that dainty tray. The tray of food, then, was not for her.

But the keen disappointment of that was nothing compared to her wonderment. If the tray was not for her, whom was it for?

above, through the quietness, came the clink of a glass, and a tremor ran through her.

A new mystery had been added to this house of surprises. A mystery in the shape of a secret guest. A secret guest! Who?

The Stranger in the House.

WHO? She could think of only one person, and yet that thought seemed too wild—too romantic! For many minutes she stood on the landing listening. She would have stood there longer, perhaps, but a door below opened, and she heard her aunt's voice,

Like a frightened rabbit to its burrow she ran back to her room, and closed the door.

If she suspected, she must keep her suspicious secret. Once Aunt Yelma guessed that she suspected, her freedom would be gone.

She picked up a book, and had just time to turn the pages before the door of her room opened.

"Your supper!"
Aunt Yelma pushed the door to after her, and placed the tray on the small table.

"Reading? Why not get near to the lamp? But it is too late! You have been busy, I suppose?"

The question was eager, and accompanied by a quick look.

"I have been doing my home-work, aunt."

"You are a good girl, Dolores. Someday you—"

The woman broke off, and went to the window. She stood there a moment, looking out at the wonderful night, and Dolores, frowning perplexedly, watched her. Aunt Yelma turned, and, noting the look, lowered her eyes.

"You must get to bed, Dolores," she said. "It is very late. Go to sleep at once. Do not lie awake and dream. Your brain must be tired after this work. You can sleep—"

"Yes, aunt, I—I think so."

"Sleep is necessary. If you feel wakeful—"

"No, no, aunt! I have been working—"

"Very well. But it is not good for you to lie awake."

Dolores' eyes were round, but she prevented herself from showing her curiosity to her aunt.

"Dear child!" said Aunt Yelma affectionately, and stroked her hair. "How glad I am that I have trained you to do without friends! You see now how worthless they are—how you can have all you want! It is a wonderful night!"

"But, aunt, I do want friends!"

Aunt Yelma looked at her sharply.

"You are tired, Dolores," she said. "You will feel differently in the morning. The night is making you feel lonely. Everything else is asleep, only the wind is awake. Night makes you morbid. The dawn skies will find you in a different humour."

Dolores shook her head, but she did not argue. She wanted her aunt to be gone.

Why this repetition of the old chant now? Why talk of friends? Did her aunt really imagine that the desire for friendship had been killed? Did she think that anything could compensate for friends?

And the night. She loved it! There was nothing morbid about the night. Why didn't her aunt go?

"You are tired, Dolores! Have your supper in bed. Shall I help you undress?"

"I am not so tired as that, aunt. I can get undressed—"

"Very well; but do not sit up late—"

Her aunt walked up and down the room once or twice, and she seemed nervous. Dolores followed her with her eyes; then, as her aunt turned to her, she pulled the table and tray forward.

"Good-night, Dolores! Go to bed immediately you have finished your supper."

"Yes, aunt."

Her aunt leaned over her, and imprinted a kiss upon her cheek, then went from the room.

But Dolores did not commence her supper. She hardly looked at the tray. Her hunger seemed to have departed with her aunt.

She gripped the bed-cover, and her eyes became fixed on the blue-shaded reading-lamp.

She must sleep! Why—must she sleep? Why was it so essential?

Why had her aunt been so nervous?

She looked at the tray of things, then up at the ceiling, as she heard a step above. Listening intently, she detected the sound, and knew that in the erstwhile

empty room above someone was pacing restlessly to and fro.

She picked up her knife and fork, and resolutely began her meal. But she was no longer hungry. She did not enjoy the food she ate. Who was it above? Why was he or she there?

A cough broke the silence, and she knew that the secret guest was a man.

His pacing continued, and she pushed the tray aside. If her aunt were so eager that she should sleep would she not come to see?

Quickly she slipped off her clothes and donned the cool nightdress.

In a moment she was between the sheets, and nestling her head in the pillow. But she turned now so that the sound in the room above could be heard.

So intent was she listening to them that she hardly noticed the sound of a soft footfall in the passage outside.

But the click of the door warned her, and she rested her head on the pillow.

She felt her aunt's hand touch her hair; but she lay perfectly still. Then the hand moved, a creaking board told the girl that the silent visitor was retiring. The door clicked, and Dolores sat up in bed.

For a moment she remained in the sitting posture listening, and she was holding her breath. The sounds from the room above came clearly to her, and she heard the sound of hushed voices.

A chair scraped, and the talking became a hum. Men's voices—one her uncle's—the other quite strange.

A conference of some sort. About what? Consisting of whom? There was something uncanny about the house that overwhelmed her.

It was something important. This hermit knew her aunt and uncle; he had come to see them. He must have done so, for he had made for the house at once.

How had he known where it was, unless he were in communication with them, unless he had been here before?

But that was impossible. He was a Boralian hermit.

Then Dolores, recalling the newspaper paragraph, remembered that the hermit had been able to speak English.

The voices still continued. There was another sound, that of clinking glasses.

Now she heard her aunt speaking.

They were listening to her aunt; but the voices broke out anew.

Oh, it was maddening to sit and listen to it all, and yet not to know what was said—not to know the meaning of it!

To-night Aunt Yelma had seemed different from usual. She had been nervous. Had this man brought bad news from that strange country of mystery? Everyone here seemed to be afraid of something or someone, to judge by their extreme caution.

The hermit had been cautious. She had made up her mind that the man was the hermit. For who else could he be?

But quite suddenly the buzz of talk in the room above died down.

A chair scraped again, and she heard the distinct sound of an opening door.

A stair-board creaked, and she fell back on her pillow. The conference, whatever its nature, was over apparently. There was no further need for her to lie awake.

She turned over, looking towards the door of her room. And out of sheer weariness she closed her eyes.

It seemed that they had been closed for hours, that she had been dreaming.

She opened them quickly, and her attention was focussed on the door.

It seemed to be opening, and she half sat up. But the sound of a familiar voice caused her to lie back on her pillow again.

For the whispering voice was her

aunt's. Dolores closed her eyes and breathed regularly.

"She is here! Wait a minute!" whispered Aunt Yelma softly—so softly that Dolores, listening intently though she did, almost failed to hear the words.

"She is asleep! Come!"

Another footstep sounded in the room. Another whispering voice, but deeply resonant and masculine.

"Yes," he murmured. There she is—the dear child! Twelve years—"

"Hush! I thought I saw her eyelids flicker! She must not know—"

The footsteps retreated; and how Dolores bewailed that flickering, betraying eyelid!

But now she opened her eyes half-wide in a last attempt to see the owner of that deep voice.

And she caught one glimpse of the bearded face. It was the hermit; she could not mistake him!

But the door closed softly, and he was gone.

Her heart beating fast, she sat up in bed.

They were gone even as silently as they came. Twelve years! What could that mean, but that he had seen her twelve years ago?

Where had he seen her—here or in Boralia?

But she had not been to Boralia—she had not! Dolores blinked. Was it possible—Boralia—

No, she had always lived in England. Her parents were English. But then, it was strange that her aunt and uncle were not—Were they her aunt and uncle? Had she lived in Boralia? Where had this man seen her—when she was three years old—when her father had died?

Oh, what did it mean? What could it mean?

She placed her hand to her throbbing head and asked herself the question.

The moon was hidden by a cloud. The room was dark, and, as she looked round, she wondered if it had not been after all a dream.

But though her eyes closed in sleep a moment later, that visit had been no dream!

Dolores Remembers.

"YOU slept well?"

Dolores opened her eyes and blinked. She had been dreaming, and at first the question seemed part of the dream itself.

But, standing in the morning sun, she saw her aunt beside her, regarding her anxiously.

"I—I slept all right, thank you, aunt—why?"

"Nothing, dear. But you were so tired. I thought you may have awakened in the night."

"I'm still a bit tired," smiled Dolores evasively.

Her aunt's look of relief was apparent, and Dolores decided immediately that she would keep her suspicions to herself. Not one word of them would she breathe to her aunt, nor would she make any inquiries, whatever curiosity she might feel.

But she would not be the only curious person, she realised that. How could she still Jane Prestwick's tongue? How much had Jane discovered?

Her aunt drew back the curtains, and took up the tray of supper-things.

"Here is some tea, dear," she said.

Then she went from the room, obviously relieved that Dolores had not awakened.

But Dolores was thinking out the visit of the previous night. She was certain now that it had not been a dream; and, if not a dream, why had the hermit come?

She listened eagerly, but from the room

above no sound came, and she got up and dressed hurriedly.

The hour was not so early as she had supposed. Chileen was laying the breakfast when she went downstairs, and her aunt was dusting.

She glanced into the breakfast-room, and saw that three places, as usual, had been laid.

Her hope that the hermit might be present at breakfast was a vain one, apparently.

She was looking at the table when her aunt entered.

"Down already?" said Aunt Yelma. "Well, breakfast is as early as you to-day. You will have your breakfast with Chileen. It won't hurt you to have it early, then he can take you for a short walk before school."

"Yes, very well, aunt."

Dolores endeavoured to cover her surprise, and her surprise was natural. It was most unusual that she should have breakfast with Chileen—in fact, it was unprecedented.

Chileen was a servant, although a confidential one. Three places had been laid at breakfast. The third, then, was the hermit.

She must not see the hermit—that was why she was having breakfast early, and being sent for a walk before school.

The hermit was a friend, since he breakfasted with them. If only she could get back from her walk on some pretext, so that she could see the hermit and speak to him!

But Aunt Yelma would see to that. Dolores loitered downstairs. But Chileen found her, and told her that the meal was ready. There was no sense in delaying, for delay would breed suspicion; so she followed him to the kitchen, and there breakfasted.

"It isn't school-time yet," she murmured, when her slowly-eaten breakfast was finished.

"Madame say you must walk—do you good. Here is hat."

He fetched her hat, and her books, which Madame Kalenzi had collected. Dolores grimaced, for she saw that they had missed nothing. She was to be allowed no excuse or pretext for returning.

Rather angrily she took the things, and accompanied Chileen from the house. He took her arm, and led her through the woods for a ramble.

The woods were beautiful, but their beauty was spoiled for her this morning. She could not take her mind from events passing in the house. She could not help wondering what it all meant—to what it would all lead.

She had saved her aunt about the jewels—was she to save her now?

All the girls, save Jane, perhaps, were decided that the newspaper report was correct, and the mystery of the jewels would be no further inquired into.

Yet in the minds of all there must still linger a doubt about Boralia. Jane, for one, was determined that Madame Kalenzi knew a great deal about Boralia, and the others were ready to believe her if she could bring proof.

"Isn't it nearly school-time?" she asked Chileen impatiently.

"We are walking towards the school now, Missy Dolores."

The girl nodded, and they walked on in silence. She recognised the path now, and felt angry with herself for not having done so before. Chileen's reply had been in the nature of a rebuke, and she disliked being rebuked by him.

She saw other girls on ahead, and knew that they were in good time. They were not the "late" variety of girls.

Nevertheless, they walked for several brisk minutes before the school came into sight, and Dolores was glad that the walk was over.

Chileen kept with her until they had reached the school gates.

"I shall come for you as usual, ma'm'selle," he said, and bowed.

Dolores went into the quadrangle, and looked about her. She was looking for Kitty, and it did not take her many minutes to find her.

"Hallo!" said Kitty, with a cheery smile. "Here you are! What did you think of the aeroplane last night? I saw you, and called. But you didn't hear me, I suppose."

"It sailed up beautifully," chimed in Pearl. "But did you see that fellow from Boralia?"

"The man from the aeroplane? Yes. Why?"

"Weird-looking johnny, that's all. His face seemed familiar to me. But I suppose I was mistaken."

"Jane Prestwich seems to have spread a yarn about him," smiled Julia Parsons. "But then dear Jane would spread some sort of yarn about anything."

"She's got her usual audience," observed Pearl Hardy. "Hear her? She's talking about that hermit from Boralia. She's got some wonderful new theory about him."

"I must hear that," said Dolores, with a rather forced smile.

And she went across to where Jane Prestwich held sway. Jane looked at her, sneering rather.

(Continued overleaf.)

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FRIENDSHIP FORBIDDEN!

(Continued from previous page.)

"How's the man from Boralia?" she asked.

"What, Jane?"

"Oh, don't pretend! The hermit chap who came to see you last night."

"To see us!" exclaimed Dolores.

"Yes, parrot—to see you! Oh, you needn't pretend! I know all about it." She paused; but Dolores, by a great effort, still smiled, and Jane looked angry. "Oh, don't try to kid me!" she said angrily. "You know him. I seem to remember his face."

"Then perhaps it is you who know him. I don't see that it matters. Is he so very important?"

"Yes, parrot—to see you! Oh, you needn't pretend! I know all about it." She paused; but Dolores, by a great effort, still smiled, and Jane looked angry. "Oh, don't try to kid me!" she said angrily. "You know him. I seem to remember his face."

"Why are they keeping it so jolly secret?" sneered Jane.

It was a question that Dolores had asked herself, but it seemed different when Jane made the query.

"I'll soon find it out!" went on Jane

angrily. "You can laugh at me now, all of you, but the laugh will be on my side."

"It's pretty safe to say it'll be at your expense," agreed Julia Parsons. "But as Miss Bowden is coming across the quad, you'd better be quiet, Jane."

And Jane Prestwich was tamed for the moment.

Dolores walked off, hoping that the scene had ended. But Jane Prestwich followed her.

"I know the face," said Jane. "I have seen it—a photograph of it. I know the nose, though I can't remember the beard. I'll trace it. He's a criminal—a missing criminal, I suppose. Well, I'll show him up!"

Dolores looked at her, and turned on her heel.

She closed her eyes, and pictured the face as she had seen it when the man had landed—as she had caught a glimpse of it the night before.

Yes, she, too, had seen it before, but where—where?

And now the face seemed clearer in her memory. She had seen it before. Perhaps not with that beard. But she had seen it. Somewhere locally? No.

The question haunted her that day. Lessons were nothing. Before her mind was always the image of the hermit's face. Where had she seen it before?

And Jane Prestwich was trying to solve the same problem. It was a race between them, and Dolores won.

She remembered quite suddenly, in the middle of the last lesson, and her exclamation earned her an imposition. But what did that matter?

As the bell rang for the finish of lessons she tore from the Form-room, and, hat in hand, raced home.

Chileen she met on the way, and when she saw him she calmed down. She did not want to rouse his suspicions.

But how difficult it was to control her excitement! Her aunt talked to her in the corridor, and all the time Dolores yearned to go to her own room.

With difficulty she left her, burst into her own room, and, groping under the carpet, brought out a key.

Looking round to see that she was not observed, she opened a small drawer. Her trembling fingers made the action difficult. But she had it open at last, and from the drawer she brought a half-charred photograph. The photograph she had taken to school some time ago.

And she examined the face—the face of the man the girls had suggested might be her father.

And that face, it needed just the addition of a beard to make it a portrait of the hermit!

(Can it really be that the hermit from Boralia is Dolores' own father? It seems too astounding to be true, but next week's gripping instalment will contain thrilling developments.)

YOUR EDITOR'S CORNER.

My dear Readers,—It is too early for me to have received your opinions on Joan Inglesant's wonderful serial; but certain little straws which show the way the wind blows tell me that

"NO JOY IN HER RICHES!"

has caused quite a sensation in the school-girl world!

I am not surprised. The experiences of Ruth Hope are so unique that no one could fail to be interested, and it is all so vividly described that one enters into the feelings of our charming little heroine just as though her experiences were ours.

Next week's long and tremendously interesting instalment shows to what lengths Sylvia Severance is capable of going in her extraordinary animosity towards Ruth. Utterly unscrupulous, Sylvia hatches a most despicable plot, and Ruth has to face a most terrible accusation.

"THE CONVICT'S DAUGHTER!"

By Hilda Richards.

The Cliff House girls continue their adventurous tour in the cafavans, and in next week's issue of your favourite paper you will read how Babs & Co., by great cleverness and pluck, right a grave wrong that has been done to an innocent person, and bring the guilt-home to the right-quarter. In this story a new character is introduced—a dog, and one of the most lovable and intelligent animals you could possibly meet with.

As in this week's issue, the

"CLIFF HOUSE WEEKLY"

will be written entirely by the caravanners, with vivid descriptions of the tour, and laughable accounts of the doings of the various girls. I am sure you will vote this jolly little magazine quite the best school journal that has ever been published, and that each week it grows better and better.

Another powerful, long instalment of

"FRIENDSHIP FORBIDDEN!"

By Ida Melbourne,

will appear next week. This instalment contains more than one mysterious and exciting incident, and you will all share Dolores' interest in the identity of a very strange visitor to her uncle's house. Hundreds of letters from readers have proved the tremendous popularity of this fine story.

"SHOULD SCHOOLGIRLS DRESS ALIKE?"

This is the title of our next week's special article, and the subject is one that can hardly fail to interest you. There are two sides to every question, and in this matter "for" and "against" is argued with great fairness and justness. I fully expect this new feature of an article each week will prove one of the most popular items of the SCHOOL FRIEND.

MORE SPECIAL NUMBERS!

I have had heaps and heaps of congratulatory letters from readers, and almost every one contains the request—"Might not more Special Numbers, featuring individual Cliff House girls, be published?" I am very pleased indeed to see this request made so universally, for it shows clearly how popular have been the last ten Special Numbers, and how eagerly welcomed would be more of the same kind.

Of course, with the Cliff House girls caravanning, their own little paper and the long, complete story must be devoted to their present adventures. Who could wish otherwise? But, though even now I cannot definitely promise, there is every possibility that in the future there will be special long, complete stories, and Special Numbers of the "Cliff House Weekly," devoted to other girls at Cliff House.

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

(Owing to the fact that we go to press considerably in advance of publication, readers should bear in mind that letters cannot be answered in this page within six weeks from the date of receipt.)

"Evelyn" (Chard).—Very interested to learn which characters are your favourites. The girls you mention are very popular with all my readers. I am afraid I cannot promise that more "barring-out" stories will be published.

"Babs and Mabs."—It is not quite possible to say who would be deputy-captain of the Fourth Form were Babs to be away for a few weeks during the term.

"Marmaduke and Tiddlywinks."—Nothing but the future can show whether or not Marcia Loftus and Nancy Bell will ever be expelled from Cliff House.

"A Loyal Reader" (Bexhill, Sussex).—Very pleased indeed to learn that the whole of your family so keenly appreciate the "School Friend." I agree with you that Barbara Redfern would not look so well with her hair "bobbed."

"Schoolgirl Gladly" (Upper Tooting).—Clara Trevlyn takes size 7 in shoes. Hetty Hendon is the wealthiest girl in the Fourth Form. Barbara Redfern's favourite occupation is editing the "Cliff House Weekly." Connie Jackson is seventeen years of age. It is very improbable that Babs and Mabs will ever quarrel. They are too good friends.

"A Packer of St. Dunstan's Cigarettes" (Forest Gate).—Very pleased to learn that the "School Friend" makes Thursday such an attractive day to you. See reply to "Schoolgirl Gladly." Thanks very much for your suggestions, which I will bear in mind.

Your sincere friend,

YOUR EDITOR.